LOS ANGELES ART COMMUNITY: GROUP PORTRAIT

Millard Sheets

Interviewed by George M. Goodwin

VOLUME I

Completed under the auspices
of the
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LOS ANGELES ART COMMUNITY: GROUP PORTRAIT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME I

Introduction. viii

Interview History xvii

TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (November 11, 1976) 1

Birth in Pomona, California--Upbringing by grandparents--Family background--Art lessons and schooling--Meeting Theodore Modra at the Los Angeles County Fair--Meeting Clarence Hinkle--High school art and other studies--Church, Boy Scouts, and YMCA--Decision to attend Chouinard Art Institute--Mrs. Nelbert Chouinard--Chouinard: curriculum--Students--Faculty--Los Angeles as an art center: museums and galleries--Earl Stendahl.

TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (November 17, 1976) 27

Cowie Gallery--Initial contact with Dalzell Hatfield--First exhibition--Edgar B. Davis Prize--Other prizes--Setting up a studio with Phil Dike--Cutting classes to paint a Gypsy encampment--Trip with Bill Veale to Central and South America--Meeting with Cass Gilbert in New York--Traveling in Europe with friend from Chouinard--European museums--Acceptance at Autumn Salon in Paris--Experiences in Paris lithography workshop--Return: exhibition at Hatfield's.

TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (November 30, 1976) 54

Teaching: at the University of Hawaii, the University of California--At Stickney Art Institute, Pasadena--At Chouinard--Sources of watercolor painting--Techniques of painting a watercolor--Importance of drawing as a discipline--Using models in teaching--Devising new drawing assignments--Qualities of a painter --Exposing students to a variety of materials.

TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (November 30, 1976) 83

Need of artists for exposure to media and materials--Artists and the future--Articulating

a philosophy of art education--Chouinard in the twenties and thirties--Mrs. Chouinard--Later Disney support of the institute--Scripps College: mural commission--Acting professorship--Building a house in Claremont--Hartley Alexander--Tuesday nights at the Alexander home--Alexander's essay on van Gogh--Humanities program at Scripps.

TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (December 4, 1976) 110

Scripps: need for studio facilities--President Ernst Jaqua proposes a Fine Arts Foundation--Mrs. Florence Lang: visits and subsequent gifts of buildings--Fine Arts Foundation--National ceramics shows--Background of Mrs. Lang--Art faculty at Scripps--The graduate program--Summer sessions--Prominent graduates--Jack Zajac--Tom Van Sant--Educating the artist.

TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (December 4, 1976) 137

Hiring professionals as faculty--Faculty unity --Contribution of Albert Stewart--Innovativeness and individuality of style--Teaching the fundamentals--Opposition to present art teaching methodology--Teacher, administrator, artist--Lecture tours for Association of American Colleges--Visiting Grant Wood in Iowa--Lecturing at black colleges--Martinez mural at Scripps--Orozco mural at Pomona College.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (December 4, 1976) 162

Orozco mural at Pomona [cont'd]--Lebrun mural at Pomona--Siqueiros in Los Angeles--Foreign influences--Building a home in Padua Hills.

[Second Part] (December 10, 1976) . . . 173

Commission to design an air school--Artistic and structural details--Decision to build other schools--Later FBI investigation of contracting procedures--Experimentation with rammed earth--Invitation from War Department to become combat artist--Cancellation of war artists program.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (December 10, 1976) 188

Hired by Life as war correspondent--To India from Los Angeles by ship--Gunnery practice

and serving watches--Building furniture in spare time--Sea stories--Painting a mural for crew's gallery--More sea stories--Arrival in Hobart, Tasmania, harbor--Encounter with drunken captain--Arrival in Madras, India--Running aground--First sight of India: floating bodies in the river.

TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (December 10, 1976). 213

Calcutta: overcrowding and famine--New Delhi: meeting the viceroy of India--Friendship with viceroy's aide--Lord and Lady Wavell--Exhibition of war artists--Meeting Lord Mountbatten--Taken to the Arakan front--Chittagong--British fliers--Battle of Bamboo Hill--Tony Beauchamp--Premature bombing attack --Brushes with death--Lucien Labaudt embarks (in Sheet's place) for China.

TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (December 10, 1976). 238

Labaudt killed en route--Tragedies of correspondents--Accompanying longest flight mission of war--Desire to contest demotion of General Stilwell--Decision to return to New York--Departure from New Delhi--The long way home: tour of Middle East--Ups and downs of return flights--Rendezvous with wife--New York: meeting with Life staff--Return to Southern California--Breaking Stilwell story against White House orders--Resignation from Life.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (December 13, 1976) 264

The Los Angeles County Fair: assisting Theodore Modra--Invitation to direct the art program--Purpose of the art show--Juries and prizes--Postwar change of format--"One World of Art" exhibition--Guided tour for Governor Warren--Arthur Millier's assistance--"5,000 Years of Art in Clay" exhibition--"Western Living" exhibition--Collaboration among artists, architects, and decorators--The finance of collecting--Calculating an artist's fee.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (December 13, 1976) 289

Need for mass art education--Developing interest through collecting--Art education

today--"Painting in the United States" exhibition: showing abstract painters--The County Museum and the county fair--Dr. William R. Valentiner--Grace Nicholson and the Pasadena museum--Gifts to museums--The Huntington Art Gallery--Growing problems with the county fair --Conflict over photography show--Subsequent development of art at the fair--"California Design" exhibitions at Pasadena museum--Sam Maloof, furniture designer--Serving on national exhibition juries--Incident at the Metropolitan.

INTRODUCTION

Millard Sheets, one of America's most ambitious, prolific, and successful artists, was born on January 24, 1907, in Pomona, California, the son of John and Milly (Owen) Sheets. Though primarily a painter, he has pursued careers as an educator, architectural designer, correspondent, diplomat, and collector.

His mother died in childbirth, and he was reared by his maternal grandparents and young aunts on a working ranch east of Los Angeles. As a child, Sheets loved horses and the out-of-doors, and from the age of three began to draw. He was not only a good student but was deeply involved in sports, Boy Scouts, and the YMCA.

Sheets's childhood art abilities were nurtured by several individuals and favorable situations. He took drawing and painting lessons from a neighboring hobbyist, had a perceptive teacher in junior high school, and was granted time away from high school to paint. Even more influential were monthly criticism sessions, offered on an individual basis by two professional artists, Theodore B. Modra in Claremont and Clarence Hinkle in Laguna Beach.

Though he planned to enroll as a freshman at Pomona College, he was persuaded to study at an art school, where professional-level courses would be available. Consequently, he became a student at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los

Angeles, to which he commuted daily on the Red Car. He took the required courses in drawing, painting, and design, but quickly developed an interest in watercolor painting. So enthralled with this portable and flexible medium, he occasionally skipped class to paint in picturesque locations. He also received basic instruction in mural painting as well as an exposure to the history of art from F. Tolles Chamberlain.

At the end of his second year, Sheets was advanced to instructor. He specialized in watercolor painting, but he also taught delineation to architects. In 1928, Sheets was approached by Dalzell Hatfield for representation by his gallery, a progressive one, located near the Chouinard campus. A one-man exhibition, which was a huge success, followed in 1929. Amazingly, Sheets has maintained his relationship with the Hatfield Gallery throughout his career, selling, he estimates, over 3,000 paintings.

Also in 1929, Sheets won the $1,750 Davis Prize from the Witte Museum in San Antonio, Texas. This enormous sum permitted him to take a cruise to Central and South America, which was followed by a six-month journey throughout Europe. In addition to visiting the major museums and monuments of France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain, he drew and painted continually. In Paris he was admitted to the Autumn Salon and was introduced to lithography by working in a studio. Sheets ended his trip prematurely, however, to

return to Los Angeles to marry Mary Baskerville, an art student at UCLA.

Though he continued a variety of part-time teaching assignments at Stickney Art Institute in Pasadena, the universities of California (Berkeley) and Hawaii, and Chouinard until 1935, Sheets became affiliated with Scripps College in 1931. Originally invited to paint a mural, he later received a one-year teaching appointment. This led to a twenty-three-year tenure as chairman of the art department, through which he established a dynamic program for professional artists and humanities students.

Sheets was deeply influenced by his relationship with Professor Hartley Alexander, a senior philosopher who was concerned about educating artists in a liberal tradition. He attended weekly discussions in Alexander's home for more than five years and implemented many of his concepts.

Perhaps the most tangible sign of Sheets's impact on the Scripps campus was the development of the Lang Art Center. Because there were inadequate studio facilities, he endeavored to build new quarters. Ultimately his wildest dreams were fulfilled by three large gifts from Mrs. Florence Lang as well as the establishment of a Fine Arts Foundation.

Sheets introduced the MFA degree to train professional artists, and increased the faculty and student body several times over. In addition to offering courses in

drawing, painting, design, and sculpture, he emphasized architecture and ceramics and introduced a popular summer session. The college produced dozens of prominent graduates, including Jack Zajac, a winner of the Prix de Rome, though Sheets claims that there was not a pervasive Scripps style. Versatility, he hopes, is their trademark.

In 1954, while recovering from a serious horseback-riding injury, Sheets was consulted on the continuing development of Los Angeles County's art school, Otis Art Institute. He argued that a dramatic overhaul was needed to produce a professionally sound program. He originally agreed to serve as acting director but later left Scripps to become the full-time director of Otis in 1955.

As director, Sheets vastly expanded the physical plant, hired a new faculty, required advanced standing by entering students, and emphasized the MFA degree as well as liberal arts courses. A gallery program, featuring historical and contemporary exhibitions, was also introduced. Although Sheets was pleased with the growth of the school, he was frustrated by the board of governors and county government, and distracted by his numerous other commitments. Though he resigned as director in 1962, he was awarded an honorary MFA degree and remained a trustee. He has also served as a trustee of Scripps, California Institute of the Arts, and Art Center School.

Although he had painted murals early in his career, including a fresco for South Pasadena Junior High School and an entire cycle for the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco, Sheets's work in this field did not accelerate until the mid-1950s. At this time he became involved, in a highly idiosyncratic manner, with Howard Ahmanson in the design of offices for Home Savings. The success of Sheets's designs, which included architecture as well as landscaping and decoration, was immediate. To Ahmanson, the offices were not only refreshing but became highly profitable investments. Consequently, Sheets has designed over forty offices for Home Savings throughout California. In completing these and other commissions in Arizona and Texas, he has established an artistic workshop comparable to a Renaissance studio, employing mosaic makers, stained-glass makers, mural painters, and architects. Though he remains director of design for Home Savings, he is planning to devote less time to this endeavor, concentrating instead on his own painting.

In addition to Home Savings offices, Millard Sheets has executed major architectural and design commissions throughout the United States. In 1962, he won a competition, through funds provided by the National Academy of Design, to design a mosaic mural for the Detroit Public Library. His subject, portrayed in heroic figures, illustrates

the great periods of learning exemplified by a library. In 1965, he designed a mosaic mural for a dome in the National Shrine in Washington, D.C. Other commissions include a pair of tile murals representing the civilizations of man and the history of California, for the annex to the Los Angeles City Hall. These latter projects were executed while he was director of design for the Interpace company, through which he directed the development of new techniques for producing glazes.

Millard Sheets's most monumental commission is, no doubt, the mural he designed for the library facade of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. Measuring approximately 9,000 square feet, this mural was made out of granite in order to withstand extreme weather conditions. As such, an entire technology had to be invented in order to design the individual granite pieces, then cut, transport, and install them. Following three years of careful supervision, the immense mural, portraying Christ and great scholars of the world, was unveiled in South Bend in 1963. Sheets was awarded an honorary LLD degree and has subsequently developed additional uses for granite in his murals.

Two other major commissions he has produced are designs for the Scottish Rite Masonic Temples in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The Los Angeles commission represented an entire architectural statement, but both demanded extensive

interior and exterior decoration. Customarily, these included sculptures as well as painted and mosaic murals.

Millard Sheets's work as an architectural designer actually began on the eve of World War II, when he designed seventeen flight schools for the air force. These were not only functional but contained numerous artistic details and were built in record time. Sheets's other wartime activity, however, consisted of service as a correspondent-illustrator for Life magazine. He was assigned to the India-China-Burma theater, where, through personal initiative, he was sent into the heart of combat.

He was involved with international affairs on three more occasions following World War II. In 1958, he served as a combat artist for the air force in covering hostilities between Nationalist and Communist China. In 1960 and 1961, he was sent to Turkey and the Soviet Union by the State Department. Accompanied by his wife, he traveled throughout these countries, visiting artists, lecturing, and giving demonstrations. Though fond of the Russian people, he is deeply opposed to their form of government, particularly censorship and propaganda. Sheets was also critical of the State Department for perpetuating fears and ignorance.

In addition to his regular duties of teaching, painting, and designing, Sheets was director of the art program at the Los Angeles County Fair from 1931 to 1958. Originally a

teenage assistant to its director, he later developed his own programs, which included increased prizes, more professional juries, and enlarged exhibition spaces. Sheets eventually replaced the annual exhibitions for local artists with a series of major exhibitions, for which objects were borrowed nationally and internationally. Such exhibitions as "One World of Art," "6000 Years of Clay," and "Painting in the United States" were comparable to the best exhibitions available in Southern California museums. "Western Living," presented in collaboration with House Beautiful magazine, was particularly intended to upgrade the tastes of casual fair visitors.

Millard Sheets also presented numerous exhibitions while at Scripps College, including a ceramics annual which continues to this day. He has also served as a purchaser for Bullock's department stores when an attempt was made to establish a comprehensive art program. Most recently, however, Sheets has been involved with collecting as a trustee of the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation in Pasadena. A long-time friend of Mrs. Scott, who established a gallery in her home, he is presently changing the nature of the collection, with the intention of building a distinguished collection of American painting. His goal is about 100 works as well as the construction of new quarters.

Himself an art collector with broad and exotic tastes,

Sheets is primarily devoted to pre-Columbian sculpture and ceramics, he has also collected Chinese sculpture, Japanese screens, sea shells, and butterflies.

His extensive collection is displayed in a large gallery on his estate, Barking Rocks, in Mendocino County, California. Purchased in 1958, the seaside retreat also contains a main house, guest house, studio, and aviary, and is frequently visited by his four children and fifteen grandchildren. Although there are several family pets, his racing and show horses, which have been a constant family interest, are stabled elsewhere.

An overview of Millard Sheets's painting can be obtained from approximately sixty works in the Steele Foundation collection. These include oils and watercolors of the 1930s and acrylics and a tapestry of the 1960s. Sheets is primarily a representational artist and remains attached to nature: landscape, animals, and people. Having traveled throughout the world, however, he has painted foreign as well as familiar subjects. Originally fascinated by the interplay of light and dark and the importance of structure, he has been more recently intrigued by color. He currently works in a fanciful and romantic manner.

George M. Goodwin

Los Angeles, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: George M. Goodwin, Interviewer-Editor, UCLA Oral History Program (for "L.A. Art Community: Group Portrait"). BA, Art History, Lake Forest College; MA, Art History, Columbia University; PhD, Art Education, Stanford University. Acting Curator of Education, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1975-76.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Apartment of Millard Sheets, 333 West California Boulevard, Pasadena. The video session was conducted at Barking Rocks, Mr. Sheets's home in Gualala, California, and at the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation in Pasadena.

Dates: November 17, 30, December 4, 10, 13, 1976; January 1, 6, 13, 16, February 5, 6, 9 [video sessions], 1977.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: Interviews took place generally in the late afternoon; sessions averaged two hours in length. Approximately sixteen hours were recorded.

Persons present during the interview: Sheets and Goodwin. Nancy Olexo was present at the video sessions to operate equipment.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interviewer pursued a full biographical study, with broad coverage of the interviewee's multifaceted career. Each session was devoted to a particular topic, though an outline was not used. The interviewee spoke in great detail about a wide range of topics. His work as a painter, however, was not particularly emphasized.

EDITING:

Editing was done by the interviewer. The verbatim transcript of the interview was checked against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, correct spelling, and verification of proper and place names. This final manuscript

remains in the same order as the original taped material. Words and phrases added by the editor appear in brackets.

Mr. Sheets reviewed and approved the edited transcript. He made a number of corrections and additions, and he supplied spellings of some names not previously verified.

The interviewer wrote the introduction. The index was prepared by Lawrence Weschler, Assistant Editor, Oral History Program. Other front matter was prepared by the Program staff.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings, video tape, and edited transcript are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the University.

Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

NOVEMBER 11, 1976

GOODWIN: Mr. Sheets, I'd like you to tell us first about your family background.

SHEETS: Well, George, I had an unusual experience. I was born in Pomona (which is not so unusual), but my mother [Milly Owen Sheets] died when I was born, and I grew up with my grandfather [Louis Owen] and grandmother [Emma Owen], both of whom--fortunately for me, I think--were very young. I think my grandfather was thirty-eight and my grandmother thirty-seven when I was born. My mother was their oldest child, and they had four daughters. So when I came along and came to live with them, they spoiled the hell out of me because I was the first son in the family. My grandfather grew up in the days where every man thought he should have a son. So from the time I was a very small child, probably three, we rode horseback together, and every year I got a bigger horse, a better horse. He raised racehorses, and all the things that I've loved all my life I grew up with. I knew all about the breeding and the whole business of raising horses from the time I was four or five years old. It was a very fortunate relationship for me because my grandmother and grandfather were extremely interested in anything I wanted to do.

I had two aunts that were still at home, unmarried, when I was born. One of them became, I guess, a built-in baby-sitter, Aunt Frances [later Frances Johnson], who probably was twelve or thirteen when I was born. In order to, I suppose, keep me out of her hair, she would sit down and do a little doodling when I was about three, and I would doodle all day without bothering anyone. I think just because of that peculiar incident, by the time I arrived in kindergarten, I seemed to have a little more of what they called talent. Of course it wasn't; it was just experience. From the time I went into kindergarten straight through grade school, that continued to follow me, as something that each teacher expected me to do more and more. I remember in first grade illustrating practically everything we did in history on the big chalk boards, and it was just a natural thing that I grew into because, I think, of my very early start. Then when she married, she and her husband [Ebert Johnson] were just marvelous to me. They were almost like a second father and mother in a way. I spent a great deal of time with them. They were both interested in the fact that I started to paint when I was nine. I guess it just never occurred to me to do anything else. It just grew like Topsy.

GOODWIN: Let's back up a little bit. Where did your ancestors come from?

SHEETS: My father's family was a mixture of German and English. The German side, starting in Heidelberg eight or ten generations before, had settled in Pennsylvania and then came to Illinois. My father [John G. Sheets] met my mother in South Dakota, where she was born. On the other side, my grandfather's name was Owen. He was Welsh and Scotch. My grandmother was English and Irish. They went out there when, I believe, he was seventeen and she was sixteen, pregnant with my mother, which of course is the reason that they were so young when I was born. Although my mother, I think, was twenty-two when I was born, they had her at a very early age.

Needless to say, they had very difficult times in those early days. The first year they had a blizzard that was so bad that nearly all the people that went out there practically starved to death. But my granddad was the kind that was never daunted by anything. He read a placard in the railroad station that said anyone that could stay with an Indian in Cheyenne, Wyoming, for three hours in a free-for-all fight would get $300. So without telling my grandmother, he rode the rods in the middle of winter to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and challenged this man, and they had a terrible fight. They almost killed each other. They both ended up in the hospital, but he stayed with him, and that $300 put that whole group in that one little settlement through the winter, which was the kind of a

granddad I had. [laughter] I've always been very proud of the fact that he was never bothered by anything--he just did it. But they were real natural American pioneers that had come, of course, from Europe--originally, their families--but many, many generations before.

GOODWIN: When did your grandparents come to Southern California?

SHEETS: Well, it was interesting. My grandfather, before he came here to settle, he used to bring race horses out from Illinois and race against Lucky Baldwin in the old Santa Anita track, about 1895. He fell in love with California, but he had extensive ranches by that time--or farms, I guess they call them--in South Dakota. And it wasn't until about 1902 that they came to California to settle in Pomona. It's so typical of him. He brought all of his stock with him--cattle, bulls, horses, and several carloads of other stock, prize stock he was raising at the time. He brought them to California--having sold all of his farms in South Dakota. Upon arrival here, he bought extensive orange groves near Pomona. He spent one year here and hated Southern California, living here. So he sold everything out in Southern California and went back to South Dakota and bought farms again. Needless to say, he wasn't very smart in some of the purchases and sales because he lost a great deal of money in the process. He spent a year

and a half in South Dakota and then came back to California to stay. I think the last time was in 1902, or possibly '03, when he came here finally. And I was born in 1907.

GOODWIN: Do you know why he picked Pomona?

SHEETS: Oranges. It was so famous in those days nationally for being the center of the orange groves in Southern California, which it was in those days. I guess the name or something appealed to them, and they just came directly to Pomona and then looked around and settled. It was just a natural decision, I guess. There were no people involved that he knew. He just came here and liked it and came back again.

GOODWIN: Did you have brothers and sisters?

SHEETS: No, my father didn't remarry for five or six years, and he and my stepmother never had any children. They were very wonderful to me always when I went to visit, but I've always felt that it was a very fortunate thing for me in a way that I grew up with my grandfather and grandmother because they were just more interested in having me do what I wanted to do. My father really was terribly disappointed because I didn't become a baseball player, which I used to do in high school. I played on a team that won the state championship. My dad, I think, always felt that it was a disappointment, because he loved baseball. He really thought that the idea of an art career wasn't too smart, but my grandfather and

grandmother just never wavered in support of what I wanted to do. So though I was extremely close and had a wonderful dad who was a fine man with a good set of values and all that, it was a very fortunate thing for me, with my mother being gone (who I think was so much like my grandfather and grandmother). I think it was much better that it worked out this way.

GOODWIN: What kind of work did your father do?

SHEETS: My father was a hay broker. He worked for a very large corporation that raised hay and very important vegetable crops in the Imperial Valley, and he was the man who really had charge of the marketing in the Los Angeles area. He did that right up until he died.

I did have a cousin, however, who was born nine days after I was born. My mother's next sister [Hallie Owen Perrin] produced this cousin of mine nine days after I was born, and she literally nursed both of us, so we grew up like twins. We were practically inseparable through high school. We used to go out into my grandfather's hillsides, which were located where Kellogg Hill is now. If you drive down the [San Bernardino] freeway, that was all land that my grandfather owned and leased. I'd spend the summer there, all summer herding cattle, and come home Saturday night for a bath. And I painted. I worked the fences and the water in the morning and the horseback, and then every

afternoon I painted, camped out there, and it was a great thing. This cousin and I were inseparable. We really grew up as brothers, very much closer than most brothers in that way.

GOODWIN: What was his name?

SHEETS: Clarence Perrin. His family was also very tolerant of the idea of my becoming an artist. When my dad didn't help me when I was ready to go to art school, my uncle helped me. It was really interesting. My dad learned to be happy a long time before he died about the fact that I was involved in art the way I was, but it was just curious how your whole life is changed by a sad thing like your mother's death.

GOODWIN: You attended the local schools in Pomona?

SHEETS: Yes, I went through grade schools, kindergarten, grade schools, and junior high school. I think it was in junior high school that I first had a great teacher. Everybody's lucky if they have one or two of those in their lifetime, and I had, I think, maybe more than average. I had the most marvelous young woman who taught art in the junior high school [Helen Daggs]. She had just graduated from college, was fairly skillful herself, but mainly she knew really what the real art world was about. It was such a thrill. I thought she not only was the most beautiful gal I'd ever met, but she had such a spirit! For three or four of us in that class she just

opened up a whole world of feeling that was remarkable for high school age. It was not merely doing busy things and making nice children's art, as they are apt to do today. She took us out, we wandered through the woods and the hills, and we made drawings, and she gave us the real art spirit, which is remarkable for that period--at least in Pomona, because there were no museums, nothing here when I grew up.

GOODWIN: Where had she studied?

SHEETS: She had studied at Pomona College, and I don't know how she got what she did out of Pomona College, because she was above anything that I think was going on at Pomona College at the time. [laughter] But I've always just treasured the memory of that woman and her depth of feeling that was so much beyond just teaching busy work or exercises in art. We were on our toes 100 percent.

A very funny thing happened about this time or a little before that, maybe two years before that. I had been dabbling around in paint, and I had been copying pictures, which was about all that you knew how to do--no one had really suggested anything else. [There was] a charming little woman [Mrs. Seward] that lived down the street, and I used to stand when I was quite young, maybe five or six, and watch her painting through the window. I was so moved, without knowing why, at the idea of her

painting. Of course, what she was doing was copying everything from calendars to old reproductions, and she saw me peeking through the window quite a bit, and she finally invited me in and asked me if I'd like to paint. So I remember very distinctly, for twenty-five cents on Saturday morning, I went down and she gave me all morning, teaching me how to mix color and what values meant. It was obviously just mechanical. So at least by the time I got to junior high school, I was fairly professional in the handling of brushes. I didn't know anything basic about form, but I did have a hell of a desire and a marvelous feeling that this was my life.

The L.A. County Fair was started by my uncle, as a matter of fact, when I was about thirteen. I heard that they had an opening in the fair--it was held in a tent the first year--for painters who did original paintings and for painters who made copies. So I rushed out with one of my little copies, and I submitted it. [tape recorder turned off] I read in the paper a few days later when the fair had opened that I had won the first prize in copying. I was about twelve, and I went out with all of the eagerness in the world to see my painting. I was standing in front of it, needless to say, and admiring it with this big blue ribbon hanging on it, and a very amazing man walked out who was in charge of the exhibition. He had flowing white hair, with a bow tie.

He was actually from Europe. He had had a marvelous background in Europe as an artist in New York, studied with Robert Henri, and he walked up to me and he said, in the most gruff way, "Did you paint that picture?" I said, "Yes, I did." He said, "Come with me." And he didn't grab me by the ear, but he grabbed me by the collar and dragged me into his office. I never had such a verbal licking in my life. He said, "Don't you ever copy another painting as long as you live. You go out and learn how to do things from nature." He just read the riot act to me. He scared the hell out of me. After giving me the devil for about thirty minutes, he said, "All right, now the first Saturday of every month, you come to my studio, and you bring some things that you've done outdoors, and we're going to get acquainted. I'll give you a criticism." Well, it was the most marvelous thing that could have happened to anyone. He was perhaps not a great painter, but he had a marvelous background. He had come to California and bought an orange grove and only been there a year, and when they started the fair, somehow or other my uncle had heard of him and asked him to head this show. That man gave me a Saturday once a month for about three or four years. It was so marvelous in opening up, again, the whole world of art. He knew all the top American painters. That's where I first heard of George Bellows, and that was a great experience for me because he showed

me reproductions of George Bellows, told me many of the stories of when they were at school together with Robert Henri and George Lukes and the whole group that became just idols to me in a matter of two or three years. So these are the kinds of things you can't make happen, but they did happen just through good fortune of the right people, in a sense, being there at the right time in my life.

GOODWIN: Do you remember the teacher's name?

SHEETS: It was Theodore B. Modra, and he was a painter in his own right. He didn't really teach--he just did this because he wanted to stir me up and get me started right instead of doing what I was doing.

GOODWIN: Did he have some other students?

SHEETS: No, I'm the only one that he did this for. We did paint together later. We used to take trips with his wife. We'd go on a painting trip for maybe a week in the mountains or sometimes down in Laguna Beach and [we'd] camp. We could camp in the sand on Laguna Beach and wouldn't see a soul for a week in those days. It was just like a deserted island.

Then I had another experience a little bit along that line before I went to art school. I submitted a painting to a professional show. By now, by this time, I was, I think, seventeen, and I had been accepted in several shows, but I submitted a painting to the old Laguna Beach Art

Association, which was so different than we think of it today. It was a group of very, very good, solid painters--maybe not great, but remarkable men--and they had a little art gallery down there that was run as a very professional place to show. Each year they had an annual show, where they allowed outside people to submit. So I sent my first painting to a professional show there--I think I was sixteen or seventeen--and it was accepted. And again, I was standing in front of my painting when the show was opened. A gentleman walked up to me, and he looked at me, and he said, "Are you Millard Sheets? Did you paint that picture?" I said, "Yes, I did." "Well," he said, "I'm Clarence Hinkle." He said, "I like that painting. I wish you could come and see me." It's extraordinary: he said almost word for word what Mr. Modra had said. "Would you come down to Laguna once a month and let me look at your work?" For about three years, I went down at least once a month and showed him my paintings. He was a very professional person--a fine, fine painter in his own right--and he opened up totally new worlds of feeling in painting. He was objective, but he had a great deal more sense of the importance of the underlying abstract form that must occur in all paintings no matter whether they're representational or not. The design elements certainly were very important. He was marvelous with me on color. But as I look back, it's the reason, I think, that all my life I have spent

so much time with young people who occasionally come to me for advice (or who I see need advice): because I can never repay what those things meant to me and at the right time in my life. It was a period that was all exciting. There was nothing about it that in any way formed any question in my mind about what I wanted to do. These experiences, one on top of another, opened the door for the inevitable thing. So, naturally, when I graduated from high school . . . .

GOODWIN: Just a moment. Did you have art instruction in high school?

SHEETS: Yes, I had art instruction, and the woman in charge of the art department [Ida Webster] unfortunately had been a Latin teacher. When Latin was dropped in the curriculum, she was made head of the art department. She was a very loving person. She did not pretend to know all about art, but she did have a real sense of responsibility, and she was very much interested in what I was doing, the fact that I was seeing people like Hinkle and Modra earlier, and by this time others. She worked it out because I did have, fortunately, fairly good grades in high school, and I was given my afternoons free my senior year to go out painting. She was the one that fought for that, which I've always thought was another great step in my life.

GOODWIN: Did anybody else have that privilege?

SHEETS: No. I had enough credits because I started

school in midsemester. In those days in California, you started in the middle of the year because of your birthday. No, I skipped a half a grade--that's right--way back in the third grade or something like that, and it put me on an odd semester. So by the time I got to my senior year, I didn't need all my credits. As a rule they made you stay in the study hall, but she and the principal, who was another great friend of mine, decided that I could do more good for myself if I went painting, which I did every afternoon.

GOODWIN: Did you enjoy regular academic subjects?

SHEETS: Some of them very much. I enjoyed math, and I enjoyed English. I enjoyed certain sciences very much. I had a terrible time with languages and particularly Latin. In fact, my Latin teacher told me in the year I repeated my second year of Latin, she said, "If you will promise that you will never say that you studied with me, I'll pass you." Normally I had very good grades, but I was never much in Latin. But I loved the others. I loved chemistry, and I loved all the other courses very much.

GOODWIN: So you graduated from Pomona High School in . . .

SHEETS: . . . in 1925. I loved working in the shops. I did always work with metal and wood and that kind of thing, from the time I was small. I think just part of being an artist, you have to work with your hands and every material.

I was very lucky, again, having shop teachers that were superior people, who made a great game out of really learning and learning well. I used to work on a steel lathe a tremendous amount, because I was fascinated with the things you could do, as well as in wood. I had a very good, I think, general background--not in the cultural sense, but in the discipline sense. In those days they taught you some disciplines and they made you learn, but they made it enjoyable to learn. Of course, the schools were so much less stirred up than they are today, and there weren't too many things that confused us. I think it's so different. I think so often of the students today, with the problems they face, relative to the ones that we faced, because the town was small, and everyone knew everyone, and we had so much to do with sports and Boy Scouts.

GOODWIN: Was yours a religious family?

SHEETS: I would not say they were really religious. They certainly were not irreligious. They were not in any sense irreligious. I went to the Christian church because it was the nearest church to where we lived. That's where I joined the Boy Scout troop. I loved that church and all the experiences, the evening young people's meetings, because we were such a completely coagulated group, and it was very different than today. Boy Scouts meant a lot to me, and I did get a tremendous amount out of the YMCA when they built it. Within about three years, I taught swimming

to the little ones joining, the ten-year-olds. I think I used to teach about 300 kids a summer to swim. I played in all the tennis tournaments and then the squash tournaments in Southern California. In fact, I won several of them, which was a great balance for some of the other things I was doing. So I never felt any difference between being a painter or being a baseball player, really. It's a very natural sort of a way to grow up.

GOODWIN: You had a very wholesome upbringing.

SHEETS: Pretty lucky, really, in every sense: the marvelous relationship with my whole family, my aunts, and their children; the great friends that we all had. It was a very natural thing and not at all strange to them that I wanted to be a painter, and yet it wasn't because I was creeping off into a hole somewhere. We participated in everything. It was a great experience.

GOODWIN: So before your graduation from high school, you had to decide where you were going to go to art school?

SHEETS: Well, it was worse than that. I really had never thought about going anywhere except to Pomona College. I had been going to the football games and the baseball games at Pomona College, which was only four miles from Pomona, since I was a little boy. I had such a feeling of wanting to go to Pomona College that it never occurred to me to go anywhere else. I actually was accepted at Pomona College to go in as a freshman in the fall of 1925. During that

summer, people like Hinkle and Modra and others, who were quite interested in me as a possible artist, finally persuaded me and my grandfather and grandmother that I shouldn't go to Pomona College. They felt that the college would be a great experience, but there wasn't really even the beginning of a professional art department there. They encouraged me to go directly to art school, though they did not discount for one moment the importance of a general education. If Pomona College had been in those days like most colleges are today, where they have at least a reasonably professional art school, I'm sure I would have gone. It was really in the last week before school opened that I finally decided to go to an art school.

GOODWIN: What were your choices at that time? What was available?

SHEETS: Well, it was very interesting. There were three schools. There was the Los Angeles Art Academy, on Alvarado Street, which several people recommended highly. The Otis Art Institute was where it is now located, but it was quite a different school in those days. Then there was a brand-new school called Chouinard that Mrs. [Nelbert] Chouinard, who had taught at Otis, and Mr. [F. Tolles] Chamberlain, who had taught at Otis, had decided to open because they felt that more should be done in basic training than any school was doing. I

went in to see the three schools with a friend of mine. We rode the Red Car in from Pomona to Los Angeles. We walked from one school to another--they weren't that far apart. When we walked into Chouinard, even though we were impressed to a degree by both of the other schools, there was no question in either of our minds. We met another wonderful person, a Miss [Patty] Patterson, who took us around the school. She taught design, but she had an immediate impact upon both of us. She was so completely knowledgeable and made us just feel at home. As a matter of fact, I think we were there on Thursday, and we started at school on Monday--which was a lucky choice in every way, because through Chouinard I met teachers that were just tops at that time, just tops.

GOODWIN: Can you give me a little more background about Mrs. Chouinard?

SHEETS: Well, Mrs. Chouinard was a magnificent character. She was very Irish. Her name was Murphy before she married a Frenchman whose name was Chouinard. Unfortunately, quite tragically, he died not too long after they were married. So she had gone on her own way. She had taught design, and she had been a painter. She was a very remarkable woman. She had great enthusiasm, but she had the fire, the guts, to carry out her enthusiasm. She really did stick her neck out a mile and a half when she opened the Chouinard school in an old, old building down on Eighth

Street, a wooden building, an old house, with a ramshackle old barn at the back and a fig tree in the middle of the backyard. I am fairly sure that I went there at the beginning of the third year. I think Chouinard had been opened for just two years, perhaps a year, but I think this was the beginning of the third year. We were so lucky. We had F. Tolles Chamberlain, who taught drawing, and Francis Murphy, and a group of teachers that were very well educated. I think here, again, you meet the right person at the right moment. We met Tolles Chamberlain, who had been a Prix de Rome scholar--I don't know how long before this, probably fifteen or eighteen years before he became my teacher. He used to talk about the great murals of Europe and Egypt and Greece. Having been raised in Pomona, I didn't know there was anything east or west of Los Angeles County. It was such a fantastic introduction to meet a man who was just lost in reverie in his excitement about these things; and he was living it as clearly in those days, fifteen or twenty years later, as he must have when he was in Egypt and Rome and all over Europe. Of course, names like Michelangelo and Botticelli--these were absolutely new. There weren't books in those days. Oh, you had Gardner's [Art through the Ages, by Helen Gardner], I guess, and a few other little books on history of art, but it was a completely new introduction to the world of art. They

made everything so exciting, we didn't know what time was.

In fact, the first two years that I went to Chouinard, I rode the Red Car from Pomona. I caught the six o'clock Red Car in the morning, after having fed about 250 rabbits that my cousin and I raised. We put ourselves through school by raising rabbits, which we dressed every Saturday. I would get into Los Angeles about a quarter to eight, take an S car clear out to Westlake Park--in those days, now MacArthur Park--and then we'd walk a few blocks down to the school. Then I'd catch the 4:45 home, and get home about six-fifteen, and feed the rabbits, and go to bed. That went on for about two years. Then, of course, I moved into Los Angeles. In fact, I started teaching my third year at Chouinard. I started teaching a watercolor class at Chouinard to most of the students I'd gone to school with.

GOODWIN: For pay?

SHEETS: Yes, for pay. I was able to live in Los Angeles in a very mediocre apartment, but it was a great change from going back and forth.

GOODWIN: What was the curriculum while you were a student?

SHEETS: They required five days a week drawing from the figure every morning, all morning. I had painting every afternoon and a design class on Saturday morning. Mr.

Chamberlain, because they felt they couldn't make it a class, let those of us who were interested--and it turned out to be about eight (Phil Dike, Don Graham, Phil Paradise and the whole group)--we stayed after school one night a week for a mural painting class where he showed us the most incredible reproductions of some of the great things of Europe and the world. He then gave us problems, which we worked on outside of school. That was my first introduction both to architecture and to mural painting. I've always been so grateful for the spirit, again, in which he did it. It was not just a pedantic course. He gave his time quite apart from school. I'm sure he wasn't paid for it, and we were so happy to spend our time. The only thing we ran out of was time. We were always so very, very busy. We kept paintings going in the back barn and out in the back court. In addition to these things, we were painting the figure and everything on the inside. It was a marvelous bunch of years, where so many of the people who have gone all over the world today came from in that very short period of about four or five years.

GOODWIN: How many students were there?

SHEETS: There were some other classes. They had the beginning of some great classes in costume design and fashion design and fabrics. They had a very strong emphasis on design. I think there was one class in the early days--I guess it was called Commercial Art. But

I think there were around ninety students, if I remember.

GOODWIN: There were women, also?

SHEETS: Oh, yes. I think there were more boys than girls, but it was fairly balanced. No one in the school was allowed to go to school unless they had a certain amount of proven ability. Not necessarily what you and I might call talent, because no one knew enough about who they were yet, but they had to have a reasonable amount of skill to get in. Again, it was a great thing. I don't think we felt competitive in those days. I think our teachers had a lot to do with the fact that we were so thrilled when someone did something exciting. We'd wish we could say that we'd done it, you know. I think it was just sort of built-in in those days. I think maybe there hasn't been quite that spirit since.

GOODWIN: What led the teachers at a school like Chouinard to Los Angeles?

SHEETS: Well, Los Angeles had a lot of advantages. A man like Clarence Hinkle always had an income, and he lived in Laguna. He loved the sea, and he painted it. It was as natural for him to be there as anywhere else; and I think at his age--because he was probably in his late fifties when he came here--I think he loved the ease of the climate, relatively speaking. Of course, Laguna was a wild place then. It wasn't all covered up with

houses. It had beautiful hills, marvelous canyons, wonderful surf, great rocks, everything. People like Tolles Chamberlain came here, I think, for his wife's health. In fact, I'm sure. They lived in New England, and I believe she developed TB. They lived sort of toward Azusa for a while, which was real desert in those days. You might as well have been in Palm Springs. It was dry and very, very good for that sort of thing. Then later, of course, they moved in to Pasadena. But I think every one of the teachers had a good reason to be here, and it was beginning to grow. There was a lot being developed in the way of real new interest in art among many collectors in Los Angeles, young people.

GOODWIN: Do you think in retrospect it was a provincial atmosphere?

SHEETS: Relatively speaking, very provincial, yes. The [Los Angeles County] Museum had a few good pieces in it. I don't know how many people know what a fine collection Preston Harrison had brought together of contemporary American painting. That was a big excitement to all of us. We used to go down to the museum at least once a week and look at these paintings. They were the only paintings we'd ever seen. It was a very exciting thing. But relatively speaking, it was quite provincial. There were no great big collections, except maybe the Preston Harrison collection. Very few old masters. They started

watercolor shows about that time, for the first time, at the L.A. museum. Very few people were painting watercolors. There weren't over a dozen in the whole watercolor society. I got in the first time I exhibited because they needed members, I guess.

GOODWIN: When was the first time you exhibited?

SHEETS: I think it must have been about 1926. I'd been painting in oil so long, and when Mr. Chamberlain encouraged me to paint in watercolor, it didn't take too long to make the change from one medium to another. But it was a very marvelous period for people working together.

Then they started to bring good exhibits. The Dalzell Hatfield Gallery opened up on Seventh Street only a block away, at that time, from the school on Eighth Street. Every noon we used to go up to the gallery and see what they had, and I saw my first van Gogh, my first Matisse, my first introduction to the postimpressionists came from the Hatfield Gallery. I never had seen--hadn't even read about or heard about--these people, and it was pretty shocking to us in those days as kids growing up in the California eucalyptus school.

GOODWIN: Right.

SHEETS: But it was marvelous to have that gallery. Then the Stendahl Gallery at that time was in the Ambassador Hotel. He brought some of the top Americans out. That was a very successful gallery until the stock crash in

'29. Then both galleries closed for a while.

GOODWIN: Can you characterize Earl Stendahl?

SHEETS: Earl Stendahl is one of the most interesting and in many ways exciting men I've ever known. Though I never had any dealings really with him unitl, oh, the last twenty years, when I bought occasional works of art from him, I used to go into his gallery constantly. He had American paintings, like Childe Hassam and a whole group of the New England painters, some of the painters from Pennsylvania, the sort of semi-impressionist. Then he had other painters like [William] Waugh and those people. I realize they sound somewhat old hat today, but they were not old hat to us in 1925 and '26. I used to go out there so constantly that he finally asked me who I was, and we became friends, very close friends. I traveled with him in Europe. I have known his family, his children since they were babies. I've known his wife, and then later, when I was married, we became very, very close friends. I've seen so much of them all of our lives. But I'd have to say that Earl Stendahl had the great excitement about art that so few dealers possess to the same degree. Some people used to occasionally refer to him as the poor man's Duveen. [laughter] I thought of Earl as being much more than that. When he started bringing pre-Columbian art into California, it was a shocker because nobody had ever heard of pre-Columbian art. His excitement

and enthusiasm for it, which developed then into art of the world, became much more than just pre-Columbian. It was because he had this desire to learn, and of course he traveled the world more thoroughly than most people and really saw more and cared more. A great man. I really loved him.

GOODWIN: It seems so remarkable to me that he was as instrumental as he was in promoting pre-Columbian and ethnic art nationally without having any formal background to do that.

SHEETS: No formal background at all. If you compared it to selling the typical California art of that time--Edgar Payne, [Hanson] Puthoff, painters who painted very nice, simple atmospheric California hillsides--it's a big jump. And he made it, and I don't know how he happened to make it. On the other hand, he used to be interested when artists from Mexico came here. He used to be interested when artists from Europe came here. Long before most of these people were involved, he knew the artists, the top artists of Europe and of Mexico. I presume it might have been either Diego Rivera or [Miguel] Covarrubias, but I think one or the other, I'm pretty sure, because he knew them both so well. I think one or the other was the one that perhaps started his interest in pre-Columbian art.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

NOVEMBER 17, 1976

GOODWIN: How did the Cowie Galleries compare to the Stendahl Gallery in those early days?

SHEETS: Cowie was similar in a way. I think, really, he just sort of filled in after Stendahl left that area of art. He was much later than Stendahl--I don't know how much later, but I would say perhaps ten years from the time Mr. Stendahl had his early gallery in the Ambassador Hotel until he opened the one on Wilshire Boulevard. I think Cowie opened his gallery about the time that Earl moved to Wilshire Boulevard. Many of the artists that Earl Stendahl had handled originally went over to the--well, I remember now; I can tell you what really happened. A group of artists, when the Depression came, decided to rent the Biltmore Gallery. They formed an association of artists. They rented it, and they hired someone to run it, but it was more like a cooperative. They struggled along with it for, I think, two or three years, and then Mr. Cowie came from, I believe, the East. Whether he simply bought into it or they hired him, I don't know, but I know that there was some kind of business relationship between the original group and Mr. Cowie. Then later he bought them out and ran the Biltmore Gallery for, oh, goodness, twenty-five years before he moved out into the

Wilshire district. He remained almost entirely on the western art side--not meaning the cowboy side, but the artists who lived out here. People like Emil Kosa and a whole group of others were with Cowie for most of their lives. He served a very important part in not only presenting them well but giving them a first-rate outlet. He had a very fine clientele, and he was a very important man in this area from the period of the middle thirties on through until his death. Then unfortunately his gallery was closed, whereas Earl had made the shift over into the ethnic arts. I had an exhibition, I think, too, on Wilshire Boulevard in the Stendahl Gallery. They were arranged by my dealer, Mr. Hatfield, in collaboration with Mr. Stendahl. Those were the only experiences I had, really, in business as far as Stendahl was concerned, but Cowie was very important.

GOODWIN: We're going to talk about Hatfield in a moment, but do you remember some of the other Los Angeles dealers at this time? [pause] They must be pretty obscure.

SHEETS: There were practically no dealers except Stendahl and Cowie and Hatfield in those early days. There were dealers who came from New York and who did show in hotel rooms, apartments they would lease for a time; but the whole scene of Beverly Hills and the galleries that developed there, that didn't start until really after the war. There were a few dealers that came, and then

they would leave. But the ones that hung on were those three, basically.

GOODWIN: How did you become commercially involved with Hatfield?

SHEETS: Well, that was a great excitement in my life. I was in my third year at Chouinard, or really the end of my second year at Chouinard, and I received a telephone call at the school from Mr. Hatfield. Though I had been in the Hatfield Gallery countless times looking at these things that really shook me up--like van Goghs, and I remember particularly a Matisse show--I had never spoken to Mr. Hatfield. He had always been very nice when we students went over there. In fact, I had my noon hour there pretty often, because I very often went without lunch to buy paint, and I spent the noon hour in the Hatfield Gallery. It was just marvelous the way he treated us, but I never had actually met him. I don't know that he knew who I was out of all the kids that came in there, but he called the school one day and asked me to call him. I telephoned him, and he said, "I would very much like to talk to you, if you could come over some time." So I couldn't wait. I went over. I didn't know what he wanted to talk to me about. He sat me down, and he said, "Now, I have seen some of your things in exhibitions at the museum and two or three places. I realize you're just getting started, but so am I."

See, I don't know that you know this, but the Newhouse Gallery, Bert Newhouse in New York, opened the gallery on Seventh Street, and it was called the Newhouse Gallery. I think they opened in 1926, and Mr. Hatfield worked for Mr. Newhouse. You know the Newhouse Gallery in New York?

GOODWIN: Right.

SHEETS: Bert Newhouse started the gallery. When the crash came, they closed the gallery because there just wasn't any business, and Mr. Hatfield opened a business really in an apartment house on Wilshire Boulevard, where he lived for some time. It wasn't until the early thirties, like '33 or -4, that he opened the gallery at the Ambassador Hotel. I'm getting ahead of the story.

He explained to me that the gallery was just getting started in Los Angeles, and he said, "I'm very much interested, and Mr. Newhouse is, in your painting. We've seen it, and we think that maybe you have a potential. We don't know. We don't know whether it's going to be practical to handle it, but if you would put everything that you've got into it for five years, we'll do the same. But don't count on anything for five years because it's going to take a while to build up a following." I was terribly excited, needless to say. I was just thrilled to death, and I started to work toward a show. I had my first exhibition in 1929, which was about a year and a half later. Well, it was just the greatest thing that

could ever happen to a young person, being still in art school being asked to do this. I worked very hard. I painted oils, watercolors, drawings, and etchings--everything.

As I think you know, two weeks before the show opened, I won a prize in Texas, which was a fantastic windfall for a guy that had been going without lunch to buy paint. I won the $1,750 prize in the Davis [Edgar B. Davis Prize] competition in San Antonio [Witte Memorial Museum]--which, by the way, not only let me go to Europe for the better part of a year, but a young architect that I knew [Bill Veale], a very close friend of mine who had been loaning me his car for a couple of years to go painting with (because I didn't have a car) and who had always wanted to go to Germany to study modern architecture at the Bauhaus, we had enough money so that he could go to the Bauhaus and I could travel all over Europe. We went, by the way, to Central and South America for thirty-one days on a trip before we even left New York to go to Europe, all with that $1,750, which is hard to conceive of today, when you know what travel costs.

GOODWIN: I want to talk in some detail about that trip, but let's talk about the show.

SHEETS: Right. Well, anyway, we opened the show, and I've always been very touched by the fact that Bert Newhouse bought the first watercolor out of my show.

And he still has it hanging in his apartment in New York, which pleases me very much. I think he's more sentimental than I am or he'd have gotten rid of it a long time ago. But it was a great success actually. We hadn't planned on it being, but they sold the major part of the exhibition out. Of course, that just made it easier for the trip and everything else. It was just a matter of timing. Of course, in 1929 there was a great deal of money; and it was in the spring, and the crash came in the fall. I was in Europe when the crash came, and I didn't even know what they meant. But then I did win a whole series of prizes that year.

GOODWIN: What were some of the others?

SHEETS: Well, I won the major prize at the Los Angeles County Fair, and I won a prize at Laguna Beach, and I won one in San Francisco. I don't remember all. I could give these more accurately if I looked them up. But it just seemed like a moment when prizes came easily. I didn't need a hell of a lot of stimulation, but the exhibition really meant a great deal to me. Well, you don't want to talk about Europe yet.

GOODWIN: Had you finished school by this time?

SHEETS: Yes, I suppose you never finish school, but I was not taking regular classes. I was teaching, I think two or three sessions a week, and just painting like mad. I was still seeing people like Clarence Hinkle and Tolles

Chamberlain in particular. They always wanted to see what I was doing, and they were so wonderful as really stimulating teachers, and I went on with them literally for years. It wasn't a matter of taking classes, but because we were friends.

GOODWIN: Did Chouinard actually grant a degree?

SHEETS: No, in those days it did not. Of course it doesn't exist now, but it did in the last few years of its life, before it was merged into Cal Arts. It gave a degree. It was a professional degree, strictly. It did not comply with a lot of the regimented degrees of general cultural background. But they did have some history; they did have certain things. When Walt Disney was supporting the school, they had some very fine courses that were required in addition to the art courses.

GOODWIN: So in 1929 you began your trip?

SHEETS: Well, I think I should tell you one thing before 1929. Phil Dike, who started to the school [Chouinard] the same day I did, and we're very close friends--by the time we'd finished our second full year of school, we decided we should have a studio. We should not just take every class every day; we should start to become painters. So we rented a funny stable up on North Alvarado. We worked like the devil for a month getting it fixed up, and we kind of halfway divided it. This wasn't where we would sleep, but it was a real working studio. I remember

we stretched canvases like mad. We got eight or ten canvases ahead for each of us; we had our watercolor board set up; we had everything. The first day we said, "Now, tomorrow, we're going to start painting." We each started painting, but couldn't see each other on the opposite sides of this little partition. I think it was about ten o'clock, and I don't know whether he came over to my side or I went over to his side, but we thought it would be so much fun to go down to the coffee break to the school. The idea of being absolutely alone in a studio after being around all these people was so difficult. I can't even begin to tell you what a blow it was really to be confined there just with yourself to fight these things out. We managed to go down there about once or twice a week for maybe a month or two before we housebroke ourselves, and then we really had a ball working. We had an exhibition together.

I got my first mural job in a big club down toward Balboa. I asked Phil to work with me on it, which he did. We were just beginning to really get into things with a bang, and Phil had a terrible ruptured appendix and almost died, which blew up our studio because I couldn't afford to do it alone. Phil was sick as could be for at least seven or eight months. He had peritonitis--and you know that's a serious matter--but he recovered, fortunately.

GOODWIN: Herbert Jepson is another artist who's being studied in this project, and I read some of the transcripts of his interviews. He talks a little about you, and he says you used to cut class frequently. [laughter]

SHEETS: Because I liked to paint. [laughter]

GOODWIN: That's right. He said you'd go on field trips.

SHEETS: Yeah. I used to cut life drawing once in a while, and Chamberlain was so tough--he used to give me hell every time I came back--so I gave up cutting that. But I did sometimes not appear in the painting classes. I went out painting. But Jepson was one of the same group. He started the same day I did. It was a marvelous group of people. We had one of the most talented students I have ever known in my life, a fellow by the name of Pat O'Day, a brilliant young painter. I don't know to this day whatever became of him. He went to work for a decorator after he finished school, and I knew that he worked for him for three or four years. I can't believe he's alive, because I think he was by far the most talented of all of us. He had tremendous taste and feeling in everything he did. Chamberlain just nearly swooned every time he saw one of his paintings, and we all did.

GOODWIN: Did you get grades in your courses?

SHEETS: More or less satisfactory, unsatisfactory. They didn't really give numerical grades or letter grades, but they wouldn't stand for any fooling around. They knew I

wasn't fooling around when I cut class. I did cut class a lot.

GOODWIN: Were you specializing in mural painting or watercolor painting or something else?

SHEETS: Well, mostly oil landscape. I was painting a great deal outdoors. I'd take big canvases, 40 x 50 canvases, right outdoors, set them up. Hinkle particularly taught me ways of laying in a canvas so that you could do this. It isn't practical unless you are willing to come to grips with the picture immediately and get the whole thing laid in, in a way. I enjoyed the way he taught us to cope with the problem, and set the color chord, and to set the value range and the pitch of the painting and all that kind of thing. I used to love nothing more than just to go right out and do one in the morning and do one in the afternoon, and I used to paint like mad.

One reason that I cut a lot of classes was that they had a tremendous session: all the Gypsies in the United States came down to the Whittier Narrows to elect a new queen. The queen died--and the queen is much more important than the king, I guess, in the Gypsy world--but there was somewhere between twelve to fourteen hundred Gypsies with every kind of conveyance in the world, and tents. It was a fantastic setup. I went out there with these big canvases, scared to death, because I was so young and some of these people looked pretty tough to me. There

were lots of the Middle European-type Gypsies. At first they didn't particularly like to have me around, but they became intrigued, and then a couple of the men would hold off anybody that bothered me, particularly kids. I must have painted a dozen or more, fifteen big canvases right in the middle of this Gypsy encampment. They were there for over six weeks.

GOODWIN: It sounds so odd for Southern California.

SHEETS: It was so odd, but here they came to elect a new queen. They came from all over the United States. It was a huge encampment, very, very exciting, lots of color. Of course, they wore all their Gypsy costumes. The tents were decorated. It was almost like going back to the days of knighthood with all the tents and the horses. They had lots of horses, too, as well as wagons and old cars and everything else. It's just one of the sad things that has gone out of our life, but I enjoyed it thoroughly. But I remember I did get quite a lot of hell for cutting almost a month. But it was worth it, and they felt it was. I know that I would have gained probably more maybe if I had stayed in some ways, but it was, you know, part of my life.

GOODWIN: What's happened to, say, the Gypsy paintings?

SHEETS: Well, I think Mrs. Hatfield has several. At one time Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield bought something like twenty paintings. I was getting ready to build a house, and they

bought a lot of the early paintings, which they've never particularly tried to sell. I don't know that they've tried to sell any of them. I think they own several of those Gypsy paintings. I know that at least one or two of them are in museums, small museums that bought them early. I don't have any of them.

GOODWIN: Do you have other examples of your student work?

SHEETS: Oh, yes, I have a few things, not too many. Some of my relatives have some of the early things that I know of. A couple of times when I've had a retrospective show, we've been able to dig them out. We had a couple of Gypsy paintings from Mrs. Hatfield in this last retrospective show I had at Scripps. But most of those early ones were sold to museums all over the central part of the United States. I'm not ashamed of them. I wish they had more recent ones, but it was fun.

I had a traveling show that Mr. Hatfield set up that went to something like thirty-four museums over a period of three years. I had drawings, etchings, lots of water-colors, and oils. They went all through the middle part of the United States, the Southeast, and down into the South--New Orleans and Texas and Oklahoma and all of those places. It just kept traveling. Many of those things were sold in some of those small museums. Some of them were bought out of the show by people who wanted a painting.

GOODWIN: Let's talk about your trip now.

SHEETS: Well, the trip was a great trip. As I said, we left here, the two of us. This man's name was Bill Veale. We went through Central and South America and Cuba and up to New York. I painted all the way, which was exciting. The ship was a regular freighter with some passengers. We hit seventeen so-called banana ports. As a rule, we might only cruise for a day and a half or two between ports, and then we'd be in port maybe two and a half or three days, loading and unloading. Of course, I'd just go ashore immediately and paint. I painted mostly watercolor. I did some oils, but I painted almost entirely watercolors. Throught the Panama and then to Cartagena, South America, and then up to New York.

Here again were these things that make real interesting moments in your life. I had a group of architects that had been working with me. I had been studying etching, and I was teaching them etching at night and also delineation--which I didn't know too much about, but I drew well enough that I could teach these people how to make delineations in some of their buildings, and I used to do a lot of delineations for some of these architects. One of the architects in that group--this was before I went to Europe--insisted that when I went to New York, I should go and meet an architect that he had worked for, for many years in New York. I didn't know how famous the man was. It was Cass Gilbert, who designed some of the first skyscrapers in New

York. So when I arrived, he made me promise that I would get in touch with him. Well, I did. In the meantime, he had written to Cass Gilbert. I had never been more beautifully received or entertained by anyone. This man insisted that I come up to the office and see the whole office by ten o'clock in the morning, and then he took me to a very fancy club for lunch, and I felt like--you know, it was just a great experience.

But the main thing was that he sat me down after we got back from lunch, and he said, "Now you're going to go to Europe, and you're going to see a lot of things. I'm sure you're going to do a great deal of drawing over there." (He was crazy about drawing.) And he said, "Have you done much drawing of this kind? I mean, of old buildings?" I said, "No, I've never done any of it, really." Well, he said, "I hope that you will seriously get into it, because," he said, "I know you have a feeling for architecture." And he said, "I think it would be a very good thing for you."

Well, I was so bewildered by Europe at first that I didn't even feel like painting, and I drew, drew every day. I made some of the most meticulous pencil drawings I've ever made in my life.

GOODWIN: Where did you start?

SHEETS: I started in Germany. We went to Germany to get this friend of mine going in school. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] It was exciting to see great old

Gothic buildings and all the things that I had, by this time certainly, known quite a bit about, through the various people that I had worked with--and [I had] done a lot of reading, a lot of studying. But I could see why Cass Gilbert said, "Draw it. Don't try to paint it." It wasn't paintable in that sense. I went out to a lot of the small German villages and made lots of drawings for about two or three weeks. Before I left for France, I met a friend of mine who had gone to Chouinard, an older man. He had come down from Canada as a retired manufacturer the last couple of years when I was in Chouinard and started to paint. We became very good friends. I loved his wife and his kid. He said, "If you're going to be over there, I'll come over and meet you in Paris, and I'll buy a car, and we'll paint." So we had the most fantastic time. He came over. I met him in Paris, and we traveled for, I think, five months. We went all through every part of France, worked our way down to the Spanish border, and worked along the north part of Spain into Italy. We ended up in Venice, where I became very ill. I had some kind of food poisoning. I really was sick. The doctors there said you've got to go back to the United States, or else go to someplace like Germany, where you have food that's a little more like you're used to. Because of all this rich food down there, I broke out in hives. Oh, it was terrible. So I returned to Germany, and I was well in a matter of two or three

weeks. Then I went back into Holland and France again and painted. I did a great deal of painting as well as drawing, but I always kept the two things going.

So when I came back finally to New York, I couldn't wait to show Cass Gilbert a lot of these drawings that I'd made. I'll never forget as long as I live, he was very intrigued and very pleased and very excited, until he saw a drawing I made of Mont-Saint-Michel. He said, "It's a beautiful drawing. God damn you, you changed the entrance." [laughter] If you look down that long causeway, you come to a dead-end wall, and you turn around to the left and then go in. I thought it would be better if I just put the opening there. [laughter] I got the biggest kick out of that. He knew Europe so well, he knew every building. He knew everything. Oh, he was marvelous. And then when I came back, he . . . .

GOODWIN: Let's talk a little bit more about your trip. Did you also visit the great museums?

SHEETS: Oh, lord, yes. I never missed a museum. I saw everything in Holland and France. When I became ill in Venice, we were headed down to Florence and to Rome, which I never did get to at that time. In fact, we were even thinking of coming back into Vienna and that area. But we never made any of that. But I did see the great museums, and of course that was the most fantastic experience because I was not on a tour. I was in no hurry; I

could spend as long as I wanted. That's something I guess I've never been able to do since, really, to the same degree--to just revel in it.

GOODWIN: What did you enjoy particularly, among everything?

SHEETS: Well, I fell desperately in love with the twelfth-, thirteenth-, fourteenth-, and fifteenth-century painting, Italian and Spanish particularly. That hit me harder. I had never heard of it. You know, I didn't know, hadn't heard anything about this kind of thing. It was such a thrill to see these, the early part of the Renaissance. I was bowled over by the things that were done later, but of course I hadn't gotten down to Italy, so I didn't see the Michelangelos or any of these things, but I think that was what hit me the hardest. I remember in the Louvre, that fantastic Pietà of Avignon. I think probably if I had to pick one painting that I'd rather have than any painting in the world, I think maybe it would be that. It's a painting that just hit me so hard in 1929, and every time I see it I feel it all over again. You know the painting I mean? It's a painting that I don't suppose many other people would feel the same way about, but there's something about that painting that is so . . . . In a way, it's outside of the realm of reality. It's another spirit. It's something I just feel very deeply about. Of course, I have always loved El Greco and more emotional things, too.

Well, that's pretty emotional. But I loved what I saw of the impressionists, although strangely enough in France it was hard to see them in those days. Here in 1929 there were no big museums of French impressionism. I'm sure there were collections if I'd known how to find them, but they were not all over the place like you find them today.

I did paint and did get accepted at the Autumn Salon, which was an exciting thing. You know it didn't mean a damn thing, except that everybody said you have to get into a salon. I worked like hell, made a painting, and submitted it. Then it took like five months, I think, before you could find out, but I did make the show, which was fun.

GOODWIN: Did you actually draw and paint inside the museums?

SHEETS: No, I never did. I never had any feeling to do that. I don't know why. I guess maybe that guy [Modra] scared me to death when he told me never to make a copy. [laughter]

GOODWIN: That was a traumatic experience.

SHEETS: My sails were trimmed on that because I never had the slightest desire. In those days, you know, every gallery had six or eight painters working in the gallery. It was very different than today, when you see one once in a while. But I loved the Dutch museums. Oh, gosh, I thought they were just incredible. The Vermeers just blew

me out of the tub. I enjoyed the Rembrandts. I didn't understand them like I do now, of course, but the Vermeers just knocked me cold. It was all such a wonderful new kind of food, and I never will get over the sense of the excitement and the thrill of seeing these things.

GOODWIN: Did your money run out? Is that why you had to come back.

SHEETS: No, no. I wanted to go home to get married. I met my wife [Mary Baskerville Sheets] about two months before I went to Europe, but I'd already told this fellow that I wanted to take him because I wanted to repay what he'd done for me. Of course there was a bad feeling in my own mind. I could have just as easily taken her instead, if her family had let her marry me then, which was a question. She was going to UCLA. I told you she had her senior year on the new campus. So anyway, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I came home, and then three months later we were married.

GOODWIN: Did she have art interests other than you?

SHEETS: Yes, her sister [Elizabeth Baskerville McNaughton] went to Chouinard when I did. She also went to the Pennsylvania Academy. I met my wife through her. My wife was an art major, but in those days it was primarily to teach teachers to teach. She has a lot of ability which she plays around with--she does beautiful tapestry weaving and things like that--but raising four kids and

having fifteen grandchildren, she has never felt that she wanted to make it a profession. She's reflected it in so many wonderful ways in our life. She has a passion which is deeper than mine about art, and we've had such great times traveling together. But that's why I came back. I was planning to be there at least a year and a half, and I could have, with the money that kept coming in from the sales at the gallery. That would have been very easy to do that. But I was gone about six and a half months or so. I've forgotten exactly what it is.

But every minute was loaded with excitement. I did get special things, like some of the caves in France. That's really something that I hadn't heard anything about, either. It was a pretty full, exciting time. I loved the towns, and I loved the country.

There's a place called Espallion. The reason that I went there was that I saw a painting by Frank Brangwyn of the Bridge of Espallion, and I thought, boy, that would be a place to go. So this fellow and I headed down, and we had a hell of a time finding it, but we finally found it, right on the Spanish border. It was just the truest sense of French peasant living and a beautiful, untouched thing--everybody gathering mushrooms and doing the things that they do, at least in a French village in those days. It was marvelous, the old dress that they wore.

Oh, one of the most exciting things that happened in

France was, I'd always heard about lithography, but no one out here did any lithography. So when I got to Paris the second time, when I was painting this picture for the Autumn Salon, I went to several art stores. With my utter lack of French, it took me a long time to find out who really was doing lithography, where you could go and work. I found out that a Monsieur Dorfinant, who was really the top man in those days, had a workshop where all the artists went to do the work. Instead of doing the work at home and taking it there to be printed, they would go up there, and he gave them very nice places to work. The stones were there, and then they would roll it up right there and see your proofs, and then they'd run your edition. So I'll never forget climbing about four stories, in this old--I think it was a thirteenth-, fourteenth-century building. The stairs leaned, and you had a hell of a time getting up, but I finally got up to the top, and right at the top step was a door. I knocked on the door, the door burst open, and the most pleasant-looking, wonderful woman, huge, big--both ways--stood at the top of the door and rattled off this French, and I didn't know what the hell she was talking about. I had a portfolio under my arm, and then just like mamacita, she reached down and took my hands and walked me into the room and jabbered away. Then pretty soon this little tiny man came around the corner. He was just as little and squirrel-like as she was big. They were

both so gracious. They couldn't speak a word of English, but I just knew that I was in the right place. They were just marvelous.

I didn't know how to say, "I want to make a lithograph," but there were lithographs all around the place, and I finally had enough sense to open this portfolio and show him a couple of these architectural drawings that I had made. He nodded and was very sober, and no more fanfare. He just takes me over to a beautiful big table, and he checks the size of my drawing. He goes over and gets a big stone, or he had a boy that did it, brought it over and set it down--put all the crayons and the pencils down, and just more or less said, "Go to it."

Well, hell, I didn't know how to go to it, but I looked around and here in this room there were about eight artists working, and I could see they were just scratching and pushing, so I started scratching and pushing. I didn't know that through the door right there [pointing to a door], into a little place about as big as that kitchen, was Henri Matisse working. I didn't know who the hell he was. No, I knew who Henri Matisse was, but I didn't know that's who it was in there. There were about six of the top artists of the period that were working there. I was there more or less for about three weeks off and on, and it was a ball. I met sculptors, and they were doing lithos. I met painters, and it was great. There were some artists

doing posters for the theater, and it was really an exciting thing.

Well, of course, I made my first drawing, and Dorfinant would come around every once in a while and mumble, and then he'd go on. Finally, I ran out of knowing what to do. It looked to me like as far as I could carry it. I went over, and I touched him on the arm, and he smiled. And he came over, and he looked at it, and he said, "Mmm, oui." With that, he pours the gum arabic on it and slops it all around. He takes a big old thing and just swirls it around. After he did that, he just poured some liquid on it and took a big sponge and just washed my drawing off. I thought, "Well, you son of a bitch, I know you're French and you're expressing your utter disgust over my drawing, but couldn't you give me a little warning." I guess the look on my face must have been really one of complete shock because instantly everybody in that place just burst out laughing. Oh, it was so funny. A couple of guys came over, and one guy had a bottle of wine, and he poured a little glass. He handed me this glass, and he took a glass, and he tilted it up, and we drank. I didn't know. I think maybe, you know, I'm being buried, and this is my farewell wake or something. Then, of course, Dorfinant really laughed. After they cleaned it all up and he got it etched up or whatever he does, then he starts rolling it up. It's like a miracle to see this thing come back. Four or five rolls, and it's

back. Well, before I left there, I met more interesting guys and two or three Americans that came up a lot. They were just marvelous to me.

And you know, I've thought about that again. Here I was, I was twenty-one--well, that's old enough, but it wasn't like twenty-one today; there was no background or sophistication or anything else. I stumbled up there. I can't even speak French, and they treated me like I made sense. You know, it was the most marvelous feeling of being accepted. I used to write to Dorfinant for years--I'd have to write in English--and then he had a friend that translated it. Then he'd write me one in French, and I'd have to go up to the college [Scripps] and have somebody translate it. But they were just like mother and father to me for those three weeks that I was there.

GOODWIN: Did you meet anybody in Europe with whom you've maintained a friendship?

SHEETS: At that time? Well, of course, since, just dozens, but I don't think so. Everybody's dead. See, I was a kid, and I did maintain friendships with certain ones in Germany, particularly architects and people that taught at the Bauhaus, but they're all gone. I don't think a soul I knew is there today.

GOODWIN: How did your friend fare at the Bauhaus?

SHEETS: Well, he did pretty well. I think he's the one that suffered the most from the fact that he couldn't

stay a couple, three years. He should have stayed at least two or three years. What they were doing was very interesting and very exciting. He spent about three months longer than I did. He got home in time to be my best man when I was married, and I think he shouldn't have even tried to do that, but he did. I think if he had stayed over there for at least another year or two, it would have gotten through to him, but he really gave up architecture after that and became a business manager for an architect. He did a very good job. It was too big a cultural shock, too big of everything. I was, you know, just kind of blundering through and didn't get stopped cold like he did. He enjoyed it, he enjoyed it very much. He thoroughly enjoyed studying the things that were being done in Germany. In Holland particularly, some of the most beautiful buildings were being done in Holland in those days. I think they've been overlooked. Maybe it's only because I've overlooked them, but I think there were buildings being built, commercial buildings and flats and apartments and things like that, that were extraordinarily good for their time. They included quite a bit of art in and through them, which wasn't being done much anywhere else. Even in Germany--well, in Germany to a degree, in England some. We also spent some time in England on that trip--in fact, left England to come back. But it was a rich, full dose, particularly when you always went to bed so pooped out from

just having experienced so much in seeing, and then I was working so many hours. I never put in less than six, probably sometimes seven or eight hours a day drawing or painting, in addition to, you know, going to galleries and traveling.

GOODWIN: So what happened after you came back and were married?

SHEETS: Well, I had a big show shortly after I came back, at Hatfield's. It was very successful from the point of view of sales. I never thought it was a good show. It would have been, if I had perhaps waited another year and let it soak a little bit. I brought back a lot of sketches and a lot of drawings and paintings that I made over there. I'm not unproud of those sketches. I don't mean that, but I think that they were more off-the-cuff than any show I've ever had after that. People liked them. I made the mistake of selling and giving away so many of the drawings and studies that I made over there that I'd just love to have now for sentimental reasons. I have a few, but the best ones are all gone.

GOODWIN: What were the prices for those works?

SHEETS: Oh, I think I sold some of the best drawings I made over there for like $25 or $30 or $35. Watercolors, $75; oils, $200, tops. But of course money meant something, too. The dollars meant something. But they were not staggering as far as the prices were concerned. But

one of the things I've been grateful for is that Hatfield has sold approximately 3,000 paintings over the years, practically all that I produced.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

NOVEMBER 30, 1976

GOODWIN: Last session we ended with Mr. Sheets's return from Europe, his marriage, and a show of some of his European works at the Hatfield Gallery. Today I'd like to pick up with a discussion of some more of Millard Sheets's teaching activities. You taught at various schools, in addition to Chouinard, in the twenties, and one of the schools was the University of Hawaii. How did that come about?

SHEETS: Well, I was invited to teach in the summer session of 1935. It was a very exciting thing to just go to Hawaii in those days. Of course, you just did it by boat. There were no planes. So I took my wife, and we had a wonderful time in Hawaii, except that she was pregnant with our second child and had to come home ahead of me. But we did have a marvelous summer. Then I went back again the following year. Then, I believe, it was the University of California the following year of summer session. I taught there two years. Interspaced were, I think it was, a night class that I taught at USC School of Architecture: watercolor painting and delineation and things connected with architecture.

GOODWIN: What exactly is delineation?

SHEETS: Well, it simply means that when an architect

designs a building, in order to show a client what it's going to look like, he hires (if he doesn't have the capacity himself) an artist to make a painting of what it's going to look like. That's simply called, generally, delineation--or rendering, but generally the word delineation is used. In fact, during the Depression I could have spent full time doing delineation. I did a great many in the late twenties. I think I mentioned the fact that I had classes of architects, and I was teaching etching and became such good close friends of many, many good architects that they wanted me to do these delineations. I liked doing them because I really enjoy the problems that are involved in projection, and I had to learn a great deal that I wouldn't have learned otherwise if I hadn't made those delineations. I remember I had a theater, one of the first delineations that I had. I think I had nine vanishing points, because it was octagonal, it was oblique, and it had a lot of funny angles to it. I had to learn a lot that I'd never known existed before.

GOODWIN: Did you essentially teach yourself delineation?

SHEETS: Yes, yes. I'd always loved to do architectural things--old barns and buildings and street scenes and that kind of thing--so it wasn't really much of a problem to shift over into doing contemporary things. Even in those days they were doing a lot of Italian Riviera kind of things in Southern California. They did everything from

Eskimo igloos to Chinese theaters, as you well know, all of which I painted as delineations for architects and sometimes just as paintings.

GOODWIN: You also did some teaching at the Stickney Art Institute. What's that?

SHEETS: The Stickney Art Institute was a small but very good little school in Pasadena. The Stickney Foundation, I think it was by the time I taught there--I believe it was left by the Stickney family--had a small school where they taught life drawing and painting and design and sculpture and, I believe, dance. It was a good little school. It was a fine little school. It unfortunately lacked enough support to go on indefinitely, but I taught there, I think, two sessions.

GOODWIN: Where was it located?

SHEETS: It was located on Fair Oaks Avenue. North Fair Oaks. It had been an old garden--it's all been torn out now--about where that new freeway goes through. But it was a nice little institute, and lots of good people came out of that--Milton Bradbrooks and a whole group of people.

GOODWIN: Was it a college-level school?

SHEETS: Not really. It was more like Chouinard. It was a professional arts school, with fairly demanding standards but without diploma.

GOODWIN: You began teaching at Chouinard while you were a student there, but you continued teaching.

SHEETS: I started teaching a watercolor class in the beginning of my third year at Chouinard or the latter part of my second year, I can't remember for sure. Many of us wanted to do watercolor, and I was doing them without much knowledge of what watercolor painting was about, but I was painting in watercolor because I was intrigued. Mrs. Chouinard felt, as the school didn't have a landscape class, that it would be good for me to experiment and try teaching a landscape class. All the students didn't work in watercolor. Some of them worked in oil, which I had worked in practically all my life. It turned out to be a very thriving class and became a major class in the school. I taught landscape painting there for, oh, I guess six or seven years, before I had to give it up on account of my work at Scripps. I also taught life drawing and life painting at Chouinard, in addition to landscape. It's a tough problem when you start teaching people that you started to school with, but it was exciting and the students were great. They were very cooperative and didn't feel like their nose was out of joint. So it was a great experience. We worked very hard.

GOODWIN: You're given a great deal of credit for reviving work in watercolor painting. Who were your examples when you began work in watercolor?

SHEETS: Well, there weren't too many people painting in watercolor here. Henri De Kruif was a very good painter

and he intrigued me very much. He was the first painter that I knew that was painting watercolors seriously. He didn't ever paint in oils, as far as I know. There were two or three other people. I think [Edouard] Vysekal, who taught at Otis in those days, was painting some watercolor, and two or three others. There was a watercolor society, called the California Watercolor Society, but I don't believe it had over twenty or twenty-five members, and most of those were not particularly strong painters. But I became very, very interested, particularly from my trip to New York in 1939, where for the first time I saw Winslow Homer in the Metropolitan and then in Brooklyn [Museum]. I made special pilgrimages to both of those places the minute I arrived in New York, because I had seen a book or two on Winslow Homer, and it was a very exciting thing for me to see the originals. It all looked so kind of common-sensible and not mixed up with a lot of theory. I think that had a lot to do with the fact that I practically only painted watercolor for several years.

GOODWIN: Did you study watercolor painting with Modra or Hinkle?

SHEETS: Well, Hinkle never worked in watercolor. Modra painted in watercolor, but interestingly enough, when I was working with Mr. Modra, we worked entirely in oil. He didn't ever particularly push the idea of watercolor painting. He was a member of the Watercolor Society, and

I'm sure that he introduced me to Henri De Kruif and to another painter by the name of Carl Yens, who lived in Laguna Beach, who was quite a character. He also painted watercolor. Those were the people that really sort of wakened me up to the fact that this was a serious medium and that it was an exciting medium to travel with, particularly.

I loved to take trips, even though they were short trips in those days, and go and paint for a week at a time or two weeks at a time. I went up into the Santa Ynez River Valley and spent weekend after weekend up there, like four- or five-day weekends, rather than two-day weekends. I spent a tremendous amount of time at the old Terminal Island fish harbor down in Long Beach, when they had a fantastic city of Japanese. There must have been 3,000 Japanese. Most of them couldn't speak a word of English. They were all from Japan. All the customs and their festivals and the Sumo wrestlers, these marvelous big wrestlers that they had. I've seen all of the festivals down there. I used to see them three or four or five times a year, and I'd go down there and camp right on the dock. They all knew me, and I painted down there literally for years. Watercolor was so easy to transport, as against having a bunch of sticky canvases and whatnot to worry about. You'd finish in five minutes, you put it in your portfolio, and that's it. It's something you can pick up more easily.

If you work in oil, you really should be very consistent and work with it on through. If you stop and then start, unless you are very careful about scraping, it cracks eventually. I was taught that craftsmanship was important in the way you handled the material. I loved to paint in oil and particularly love acrylic for murals. But watercolor is the most marvelous thing in the world because I very often work on a painting I started maybe ten years ago that I wasn't interested in at the time enough to complete. You dig it out, and you see something there, and you may change it tremendously, but there's no reason why you just can't go ahead. You don't have these technical problems at all.

GOODWIN: What are the basic steps in painting a watercolor?

SHEETS: Well, it depends, I suppose, on the particular artist you talk to. But some people make watercolor a very precious medium and say you can't ever work over a wash again. That is the first time, and that's it. Other people have every kind of theory about it. But if you look at the history of watercolor, and you trace it from the early wash drawings that were made in the Renaissance and on down through the English watercolors particularly, who really made wash drawing . . . . They made beautiful pencil drawings and tinted a little bit of color, until Turner came along. He began to really paint with this as

a medium--nothing in the way of the strength, perhaps, of Winslow Homer, but nevertheless they were big eye-openers in the whole development of painting. His whole kaleidoscopic sense of color and light and movement, which he developed both in his oil and his watercolor, were very painterly. They were not tinted drawings, although he did do lots of tinted drawings, too. He made hundreds and hundreds of studies in watercolor that were more like the traditional use of watercolor, but he also took it way beyond that in his serious painting. Then when Winslow Homer came along, he really changed the medium from anything like a ladylike tea party into some honest-to-God painting. I don't think he even thought of the medium as being precious or that you had to say, "This is a watercolor." He made a painting. I think this is what excited me about it and why I feel that there should be no rules or inhibitions.

First of all, I don't think there's anything that you can do in oil that you can't do in watercolor and keep it fresh, keep it alive. I don't think that there's any key, whether it's high or low or in the middle or way down in the bass notes, that you can't do in watercolor if you've learned enough about the medium to keep it luminous, and that is just a matter of relationship, both in color and in texture. I think that it was this desire to push it beyond a certain point that kept me going.

I felt after about fifteen or twenty years that I'd hit a dead end. I couldn't go beyond a certain point. It took me at least a year--it should have taken probably five minutes--it took me at least a year to discover why I was inhibited, why I was unable to go beyond a certain point. It was this idea that you had to leave this one first over clear, translucent wash, and lots of little white speckles here and there, like Winslow Homer did and a lot of other people did, to make watercolor look like a watercolor. Then I suddenly realized that a painting has a pitch the same as a musical composition. If you have a high note and a low note on a piano keyboard, every composer doesn't extend their composition to both ends. They can take the center, third, or three-fourths down for a quarter, or up towards the top, and they can compose. Well, an artist has to do exactly the same thing in making a serious painting. Where do you want to pitch the painting? First, in value, in dark and light. Secondly, in terms of the intensity of color or the relationship between muted and intense color. All these things you have to preordain, if you're going to make a serious painting. You have to decide before you start where it belongs. If you go at it just kind of methodically and let it work out, it always looks like that, too, at the end. I found in watercolor, the minute I really determined the pitch and where the pure color was to be and what shapes were to be

important, then I no longer thought about it as a watercolor; I thought about it as a painting. The moment I did that I felt free, and that's why I think it's such a fantastic medium. Everybody says it's so precious and difficult; I think it's the easiest medium in the world. Mechanically, if you learn that water runs downhill, and you know something about drawing, and have a feeling for design, and work hard to do what I've been talking about in terms of setting value schemes and color intensities, it's so much easier than sticky oil.

GOODWIN: Do you do a preliminary drawing when you make a watercolor painting?

SHEETS: Sometimes. Do you mean on the paper itself?

GOODWIN: Yeah.

SHEETS: Yes, I do a minimum amount of it. I don't like to make a finished drawing of any kind and then try to tint between the lines. I lay out very quickly, and with the greatest economy, the basic lines, the basic shapes, and then just go right into it and paint and draw with my brush. I like to work from the more general toward the particular--in other words, get the whole thing swimming in some kind of a hopefully interesting juice that gives it this color chord that separates good painting from ordinary painting. If you can get that color chord going and get your big shapes and values established, then you can work as long as you want on development, on refinement

of detail if you wish that, to include detail. Or you can spend more time even getting it more simple, depending on what your feeling is about the subject.

I like to think that every subject presents a different problem. I think it's much more exciting if you can keep from the sense that you're painting yardage. I think that sometimes you see an exhibition and it looks like someone cut off, every three feet, a piece of the same color tone, the same shapes, and the same character. I think an artist reaches a point where they're imposing a style without much feeling for the world around them when that happens. I feel that if you're really interested in life and the wonderful things that exist, there are no two moments alike, and there are no two experiences, no two subjects certainly that should draw out the same response. I like the idea, whether it's in watercolor or oil or acrylic, whatever the medium is, to set this chord right and get the shapes working. The more you study the basic character that exists, the more you're apt to simplify rather than to refine, but it's just a nice evolutionary process.

GOODWIN: How much time would you spend on a typical watercolor painting?

SHEETS: Oh, I guess the proper answer is fifty years . . .

GOODWIN: Or "the necessary amount."

SHEETS: But that's too often used as a way of escaping the fact.

GOODWIN: Are they really dashed off?

SHEETS: They vary enormously. Some of the best watercolors I've ever painted, I've painted in an hour. I've spent two weeks on others that I thought were just as good. If there's a reason to go on and keep building for something, then you go on--not merely to refine but, as I said a moment ago, maybe go the opposite way, to simplify and broaden the punch that you're interested in. That's another thing I love about the medium. I don't think it's possible to go too far with watercolor. All you have to do is put it under the faucet and take a sponge and lightly remove what you've put on, or part of it, and go right on. You can sponge down any dark. I've sponged down pure black and made it pure white without any difficulty, if I've found I wanted to move a shape for some reason, that I've made a mistake in the impact. If you don't just rub the color into the paper, you can (with care, with a few pieces of paper as guards to the edges) you can just lift (always with one stroke, and wash your sponge completely and take a new, clean swipe at it) you can take from black to white in nothing flat. It's a great medium because you're not stuck with it, and it gets over that precious attitude that so many people have.

To answer your question, anywhere from one hour to two weeks.

GOODWIN: But you would normally paint a watercolor in one sitting?

SHEETS: Well, I like to work both indoors and outdoors. I like to work outdoors, and I work very rapidly, as compared to a great many people, because I've been at it, I guess, so long, and I've trained myself to do it. Very often I will work very rapidly for an hour or maybe two hours outdoors, then bring it back to the studio and flip it in a frame and have it around for a few days while I'm working on other things. Out of the corner of the eye, you look at this painting, and you begin to see all of the things that need to be really done. I'm speaking of one now that hasn't been tickled up with a lot of silly refinement, but where you have the basic chords set and the basic shapes set. Living with that a few days, it's just as though someone else had painted it. You can look at it with all the freshness in the world and say, "Well, that needs to be kicked right here, hard; this thing needs to be pushed," or "I've got something there, and I'm going to preserve; and whatever I do in the way of refinement, I'm not going to let that get away." That's sometimes the hardest thing of all. It's not so hard to come in and tear it apart. But if you've got something you know is right, it's very magic, in a sense, to go on with it. The addition of almost anything sometimes becomes a hell of a problem, and you have to be extremely careful that you aren't going to get lost in small questions. Now, that's when you go outdoors.

Now I like nothing better--before I go to sleep at night, maybe I've been reading a long time, and suddenly ideas will begin to develop. I may take a piece of paper, sitting up in bed with just a pen, and make three or four pen scratches--not make any attempt to do anything that anybody else would give a damn about, but to me it would set the whole working thing in progress in my head. By the next morning, I can go out to the studio, having done that at night--maybe there's something in your subconscious, I don't know what it is--and I can just start right in and paint like mad and be sure I know where I'm going. I've had this happen so often that I'm beginning to believe it. I'd rather work this way, really, than going outdoors, although I love both. I think an artist probably has to do both, to not lose track of the fact that there is an infinite, wonderful magic about life that surrounds you. I think if you want to say, "I've got it all digested and I don't need to go back," I think there's something kind of smug and small about that.

But I love particularly working from--not memory but from a spirit of something that hits you hard. Maybe ten years before. Lots of the paintings I'm doing today are made from a very minute pen scratch that I made ten years ago. I have hundreds of notebooks filled with drawings on every page. Sometimes just thumbing through these, I'll see something, "Oh, boy, I'm going to paint that." It's

more vivid, the part that matters today in your mind, than what your eyes saw, because now you're talking about what you know, and not what you see. And they're two different things: the things you know, the things you've really digested, and you've really analyzed and you've really observed, and you really care about. This is when I do my best painting. There's no question about it.

GOODWIN: Did you always paint through an entire day or do you prefer working, say, in the morning or the evening?

SHEETS: No, I don't necessarily move by, as they say, the mood. I'm always in the mood for painting. I can't get out of it. Sometimes I get absolutely pooped, and I just can't maybe do good work, and I'll just go and lie down for a half an hour. I've got a place in my studio where I can, and I'll get up and feel like a million dollars and work another few hours. But I like to paint, as a rule, from eight-thirty or nine in the morning until dark. Very often I go back after dinner and work two or three hours at night. That's when I feel the best. If I could organize my life that well . . . .

GOODWIN: Weekends, too?

SHEETS: Yes. I suppose if I analyze my life, I would say that I've done more painting on the weekends. When I say weekend, I don't mean merely Saturday and Sunday, but as many hours and days as I can tack on top of that, because that's when I don't have to do something else sometimes.

I don't get the feeling ever that I'm being pressed when I'm painting. I just feel so excited to be able to paint when I often have to do other things that I get tired physically, but I never get tired mentally.

GOODWIN: Getting back to Chouinard a little bit more, what kinds of points would you typically cover in a drawing class? What would the curriculum of drawing be?

SHEETS: Well, I believe that drawing is so important as a discipline and, I think, opposite to the two streams of contention that generally are formed about drawing. There's the academic approach that says, well, you've got to be able to draw a cast, and you've got to be able to draw every muscle, and you've got to be able to do this thing academically if you're going to be free. Or the other group that say if you get down into that kind of detail that you're going to lose your imagination, and therefore you just emote on a piece of paper. Now, I think both of these two different extremes are not only extreme, but I think they're dead ends. I think that drawing is the easiest way to grapple with the problems of structure.

Every artist must have the ability to understand and to control, whether it's in carving wood or modeling in clay or making a drawing or making a painting. You must understand the meaning of structure, what lies behind what you see with the eye: the way a plant is

actually formed, the way it grows, what its movements are, what its essential qualities of structure are, rather than just the fuzziness that the eye sees on the surface. It's to understand what holds up this tree, which, when you look at it with an unthinking eye, is just a great big mass of foliage covering most of the structure, covering most of the limbs and the trunk. It's the realization that it's growing out of the earth, supported sturdily with great root systems that go down like the tree grows above. Then, as this thing moves up, there's a particular kind of growth movement. Every tree family has a different growth movement; every plant family has a different growth movement. Every animal, every person has certain characteristics that differ from each other. It's to understand the essential qualities of structure that I think should be the basis with which you approach drawing. Now, that's both imaginative and it is also very demanding. It's to be able to grapple with not only the third dimension, but the two-dimensional aspects. It demands that you think less about making a drawing and more about what constitutes the world.

If one teaches drawing this way, one inevitably is teaching a great deal about aesthetics, because aesthetics are based upon certainly thousands of years of realization of the structure of life, the essential things that we can aesthetically respond to. You bend a man's leg backwards,

make the knee go the other way, and there's a natural reaction against this because it's obviously a broken leg. It's an unhappy-looking leg. Now, I don't mean that everything has to be happy and everything has to be pretty, but the more you understand about structure, the more you are really attuned with the qualities that have created the aesthetic understanding of mankind. Drawing is approached this way, instead of reducing life to a perspective treatment or something that simulates the way it looks to the eye. I'd like to think of a man, if he's painting a valley and a mountain that moves up or hills that move up, and they're robust, wonderful forms, I like to think of it almost as a man that's going to traverse the ground. He's going to walk right into the thing. He's aware of whether the land tilts, whether it's going down or tilting up, or whether it's curved over. If you teach structural drawing, it doesn't take the student very long to grasp how important it is to learn certain things about perspective, just as a means. But if you attack it the other way, and say, "Now, your perspective is wrong; therefore, you've got to put this line this way and this line this way," as they did in the old academic way, what you're doing is just making a very sad victim of the eye. You're not in any sense teaching the mind to comprehend what's back, behind, which is more important than what you see. It's the part you don't see of everything that makes the thing total,

and a sculptor realizes that from the very beginning.

That's why, I think, most sculptors draw better than most painters. In my opinion, I think that the most exciting drawings sometimes are made by sculptors rather than painters because they do comprehend the structural. Maybe they're more exciting to me--maybe it's because I like that kind of drawing--but I think that a painter like Michelangelo, who was also a hell of a sculptor, really never thought of the world reduced to a two-dimensional view from the eye. The vitality and power of Picasso at his best, particularly some of his great drawings done in the Pink and Blue periods, when he could take a fine line and draw the contour of a clown and never put one touch of shading in, but expressed the fullness, the fatness in the arm and the flow of the movement--this is something that is comprehended. It's understood by the artist. It isn't seen by the artist with his eye; it's seen with his head. It's the most exciting kind of drawing to me when whatever it is that you're interested in, you put the full life into it and not merely the reduction of it to what your eye sees. So that's the kind of drawing that I've always been interested in trying to teach.

GOODWIN: When you taught drawing, did you begin immediately with the human figure?

SHEETS: Most of my classes I alternated between the human figure and still life, because sometimes it's easier to

break right into a life class that you might teach for two weeks and set up a still life for a week, where things didn't move; and yet they could come to grips with the problem of the structure of every form of it and which way are the axes tilted and so forth. Then immediately they see that more clearly with the figure. Then back and forth, they see the vitality of the figure and the movements of the figure that they have to animate a still life with. So I really liked the idea, and then I used to take them outdoors a great deal. I'd get them to pick out any weed, and maybe the weed was a tiny miniature thing, an inch and a half tall. I'd say, "All right, we'll go back inside. Now you draw this thing four feet high." That's when you came to grips with the difference between your eye and your head, or your mind and your understanding. Whatever it is you think with, it's more than just brain, certainly. It has to do with your heart. It has to do with your love and affection for life itself. I'd bring in birds. I loved roosters because I raised lots of fighting cocks. I'd bring these roosters in, and we'd put them in a cage. I loved to bring in all sorts of surprising things, because anytime the student is more interested in the subject, they put something more into it. I think that just going to the same old life class every day and seeing a male model this week and a female model next week--and even though I always like to see the

female models--to me it's what you're trying to do in the way of developing the perceptive insight. Not the kind of drawings they make--the drawings will come inevitably if they have the perception. All that you can do for a student is to hope to entice him or her into getting excited about comprehension. If they understand it, they can draw it. They can look at it and get clever as hell tickling up kneecaps and breasts and anything else as far as that goes, but it doesn't mean anything. It's to comprehend the magic of the full form that I think is important.

Out of the years of having taught drawing, it's been exciting to me to see how certain people, certain students along the way--not due to me but due because they had it, certainly because it was in them--once they grasped this thing, they were the ones that just moved right out ahead into space and ended up very often in an abstract world or some other world. It didn't have to be a realistic world in a representational sense, because to me the best abstract art is basically very structural. An artist that understands structure, understands the real organism of color and all this kind of thing, is the guy or gal that can put an abstract thing together. So it's not a matter of just teaching little disciplines or little skills. It's making the head comprehend. Of course, I apply the same thing to painting or to modeling and

sculpture or designing a building.

GOODWIN: What's the most difficult kind of problem that you would present to students? Would it be a group of figures?

SHEETS: Well, that's an interesting question, because recently in my teaching, quite recently . . . .

GOODWIN: You're not doing any more teaching?

SHEETS: Well, I've been teaching a great deal the last three or four years. I take at least one group a year somewhere on a workshop, maybe to Japan or to Tahiti or to Greece. That's been partly so I could plan a year ahead, having agreed or contracted myself to do this with the people that put on these workshops. I've had to say to my office and to clients that I'm not going to be here for a month. That's part of the reason. The second reason is, I guess it's probably like an old fire-engine horse: when the bell goes off, he likes to go to a fire. I love to teach. I really believe that people who are on the firing line should do it. I don't think it should be left up to people who just theorize about it, or who may have done some work but who haven't really gone out and really won their spurs. I think students need people who will come to them, without any question admitting they know very little, but who are going to tell about what they think really is important. So I love to teach, and I think last year I taught five workshops.

GOODWIN: How large are the groups?

SHEETS: I try to limit them to twenty-two, but sometimes they crawl up to thirty-five or thirty-eight--not by my choice, but because it was hard to eliminate certain ones. But recently, and this is a sad commentary when you think of fifty years of teaching, I think I've not only done the best teaching, but I think I have learned much more how to present the kind of problem that challenges both their intellectual capacity and their emotional insight. By literally manufacturing the kind of problem that stirs the hell out of them, I've gotten results I've never dreamed of before, both in color, design, and in the realization of how important drawing is. I constantly say to students, "You must carry a book with you all the time, and unless you make one drawing a day--not for the sake of a drawing, but to learn something about something you didn't know about (there isn't a house, there isn't a place in the world that doesn't have something that you ought to investigate)--you aren't being true to yourself."

Working this last summer [1976], I had about fifty artists up at Asilomar at Jade Fong's workshop. Some of them were extremely talented and extremely advanced in their painting techniques and skills, particularly in watercolor, but I found, like most such groups, they're abominably weak in the structural sense. They paint watercolors that not only win big national prizes, and they get

in all the shows, but if you have the knowledge to know what should be there in addition to what is there--in other words, if you really know what structure means and you look at this thing and you say, "Well, they have a marvelous taste. They have a wonderful sense of the aesthetic beauty of texture and color and movement and all of that." But to anyone that knows, it's a dead giveaway if the other thing doesn't exist. It could be an abstraction; I'm not talking about representation versus abstraction. You know whether it is or it isn't there. I found in this last summer's work particularly that I got these people so excited about really trying to go back into structure--in fact, in two weeks of solid work up there, eight hours a day, it was astounding to see what they did within their own painting and the excitement that they felt having made this development. This is where some of the painters have been working twenty, twenty-five years.

GOODWIN: What were the problems that you assigned?

SHEETS: Well, I gave them some very strong problems in color relationships and shape relationships, but then made them go out and make drawings that were very hard-boiled in terms of subject matter. They came back and applied those drawings right on top of just some exciting color and shape relationships. Then they begin to see how they work the structural side right on top of those tonalities

that were already established. It's so hard to take them out and say, "Now, no color ever repeats itself; no shape ever repeats itself. You can do that, and a real artist eventually can do it." But you can show them that a painting must have a color chord or it isn't going to be worth a damn. I don't care how you paint it or who painted it or when it was painted, a painting without it loses. It doesn't last. It disappears in time. But a picture can be very modest if it has this magic of a special color chord and a value relationship and design sense that will go on. So they treat this quite abstractly first, really organizing some shapes and some color, and I gave them some very deliberately tough restrictions. Then they would go out with no thought of what they'd already done. Sometimes I'd have them do it the other way around: I'd have them make a drawing without knowing where they were going to go, and then come back and make this thing. I then said, "All right, now take that drawing and just lay it down, the basic shapes, right on top of this thing. Now let's see what happens when you apply these forms, not letting for one moment this color or this tonal chord get mixed up. Let's see if you can keep the combination of the two." I think I saw the most astounding results, and it was a very thrilling thing. It has been a big thing in several of their lives because I've seen several of them many times since.

They brought several things to show me they're so excited about what's happened in their thinking, a whole new way of going. Not that that has become a style--I don't want you to think that--but as a way of reconciling the spirit and the head. I feel that in painting, these things do have to be reconciled.

I think of a painter as being a series of many parts, and certainly the skill of a language is a prerequisite. You shouldn't get a gold medal for knowing how to do something. The technical skills are very tough and very disciplined: drawing, and control of color, and shapes, and all these kind of things. These are things you should learn, in the hard-boiled sense, intellectually, I think. Your creative side is not in your skill; it's in your quality of mind. It's the way you respond to life itself. It's the depth with which you see and feel everything around you that is creative. If you have the skills, then you have the power to begin to get at this thing which is within you that needs to be focused. Then, of course, you have the third thing, and that is the purpose. If it's to be strictly a personal painting or a personal piece of sculpture, that's one thing, but if it's to be used in a certain way, that's something else. These are extracurricular problems as you go along.

But I feel so strongly that every art is so essential to mankind, because these are the only means which we have

to get at certain parts of the human understanding, to communicate areas that are otherwise uncommunicable. There's no substitute for music or for painting or for sculpture or for dance or for literature or for poetry. These are such incredibly important languages that have persisted through thousands of years and through constant changing styles and instruments and techniques and materials. Never has there been a stoppage of change, but this desire goes on to be able to say something that is otherwise uncommunicable.

Now, if this is true, then I think an artist has the dual problem of learning the skill with which to do it, hopefully with something there that's to be expressed. You can turn it right around. You can say, "With all the skill in the world, if there's nothing there, it's sad." But it's equally or even more tragic if you have a lot to say, and you won't take time to learn the skill, which is typical of today's educational system--to never really learn the skills to free what is within there. Now, that is real sadness. This I meet daily--marvelous, sensitive, interesting young people, particularly, who obviously have an aesthetic sense that's way out beyond what we had when I grew up. They've been exposed in so many more wonderful ways to so much more than we ever had in the way of exposure. I think there are so many things in our lives that, in spite of the confusion, has brought about a

sense of a response to the aesthetic. But very often they get into these kinds of classes taught by, to me, people who shouldn't be teaching, who bravo their spirit and bravo their imagination, but say, "Stay away from tough disciplines because that's going to inhibit you." That is baloney. The result is, you've got a lot of young people today coming out with degrees who have the best of intentions but have no ability to really become useful to themselves or to anybody else. A large number of people who would like to work, just to get a job, show you a portfolio. I must say that it doesn't make much difference whether they study in the East or the West or the Middle West; the portfolios mostly look alike. It's a complex of odd mixtures of all the different kinds of art that are popular today in teaching. Yet when it comes right down to some simple basic things like, "Do you know how to draw?" no, they're not interested in that. They say, "Oh, that's a terrible thing." I ask, "Can you really paint?" "Well, this is my idea of painting," and they've got a few little collages stuck together and that sort of thing. That's sad, because if they had feeling, they should have been liberated by having a language that gave them power.

GOODWIN: What kinds of materials do you expose your students to?

SHEETS: Well, I like to expose them to as many as possible. I think a painter should do sculpture. I think he should

work in ceramics. I think he should take some architecture. I love to see them work in metal and wood. I don't think a good designer or a good artist today can escape the need to work in these materials. He can't do it all at once, but in certainly four or five years in graduate school, they should have had all these experiences. The problem is the guy says, "I want to be a painter. I don't want to do sculpture." Or the guy says, "I'm a sculptor; I don't want to paint. I don't want to draw. I want to do this. I'm going to be a ceramist." So they go in and they stir clay around, and they mix glazes, and they put a little bit of Japanese decoration on it, and say, "This is ceramic." If that potter was taking sculpture from a tough guy who really knew the meaning of monumentality, who knew the meaning of imprisoning within that piece of clay the most exciting life quality, then the pot would be different.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

NOVEMBER 30, 1976

GOODWIN: You were saying, Mr. Sheets, how you would encourage a student not to specialize in either painting or sculpture or ceramics, but to become familiar with all those fields.

SHEETS: Well, maybe I should even clarify what I said, because I think I misstated it. I think an artist should use whatever basic medium or media--one, two or three--that they would like to major in, but I think that the broader their base of experience, the better artists they're going to be in whatever chosen medium they finally end up with. I think it's fine. I'd rather have a young student say to me, "I'm going to be a sculptor, and I don't give a damn what happens--that's what I'm going to do." I'd love that. I think at the same time if you can get him or her to understand that the more they really get into some basic drawing, get into some basic design, color, painting, that it will enable them enormously to be broader-based people in sculpture. Of course, the same thing would reverse, any way you'd want to look at it.

The reason I labored that point about materials, working in a variety of materials, was this: I'm prophesying now, but I'm guessing that in the next twenty years the artist--the painter, the sculptor, the designer--

is going to be doing much more in connection with our daily lives than we've done in the last forty or fifty years. I think it's going to be absolutely requisite. I think it's inevitable. There will always be the painter who doesn't become involved in these things, but I think that the need of society is going to be so great and the demand so great, as I see it and have felt it for a long time personally, that artists will find incredible outlets and opportunities as artists. If they are able to deal with the problems of today. Now, in order to design, you have to understand what you can do with glass, what you can do with metal, what you can do with wood, what you can do with ceramic, what you can do with the new plastics. These are all materials that unless you have some feeling for their capabilities, it's not very possible to design intelligently. Sure, you can screw around and make some arty-looking attempts, but to really have the excitement, the more the artist knows, the better. That's what I meant by exposure to materials as well as working in a variety of media.

But just to finish that point, I believe that the next twenty, thirty, forty years--I really believe this--will be the most exciting years of opportunity for the artist. People who worry about the artist and worry about government federal projects and all that kind of stuff bore the hell out of me because there isn't a thing in our society

that doesn't need to be redesigned, rethought, clarified, enhanced, made more beautiful for a reason to live. It's the artists that certainly should have the responsibility of becoming involved with this. Our environment, we're talking about. We talk about it strictly on the basis of preserving wildlife and the fauna and the land itself. There isn't anything about our country that doesn't need to be made more aesthetically acceptable. An artist can't afford to live in an ivory tower alone, only the great ones, and the great ones will always live in ivory towers. And I'd fight like a son of a bitch to help them have that tower, but I don't think that is where you're going to absorb these thousands of young, talented people who have a great deal of ability but who perhaps do not have that special capacity of genius, who need to apply themselves to the incredible, wonderful opportunities as creative, imaginative people with conviction, not merely as commercial artists, not merely as industrial designers who learn a little, narrow trade. I think an industrial designer should have the broadest-gauged background in fine arts (only I hate to use the words fine arts, but what is so often referred to as fine arts, because this is what so much of industrial design lacks). I think that the broader the base, the higher the aspiration, the more exciting the opportunities will become.

Now, I say this not just because I'm trying to be

Pollyanna, but because I have spent a tremendous amount of my life with tough business people, tough industrial people, bankers, all kinds of people, politicians. I love this. It's a great game with me. I don't play it politically, and I don't play it to be a big wheel. I play it because these are the people that I find extremely hungry, deeply hungry, amazingly susceptible to a whole new way of looking at life. If you can go to them with ideas that they can comprehend--in other words, not just a bunch of jargon that's mixed up for the art critic, the kind of things that William Wilson [of the L.A. Times] writes (which to me is gobbledygook: it has nothing to do with education of the public; it has nothing to do with anything important in art as criticism)--but if you go to people with language that they can understand, and you build the bridge between your background in so-called sensitivity and experience in the aesthetics, and you build a bridge so that you enable them to see into this world, I have found that instead of being antagonistic or feeling that it's ladylike or not important, they're hungry. They grab; they reach; they become terribly involved. It changes their life.

The greatest pleasure, I think, in my life has been to know that out of every bank I've designed and almost every job I've ever had that had to do with tough, hard-boiled industry, I've not only made some of the greatest

friends I've ever had in my life, but I have helped people see a totally new way of existence. It isn't because I'm out to preach or to sell. They are susceptible because they need it; they're hungry. They don't know what they're hungry for, but they're hungry. That's why I think if we could educate artists to be total people and not just narrow-tracked people with a small view of the potential of life or the potential of an artist, that this thing will come about. And I think it will inevitably come about, because we're drying up in this other thing. It's going down the drain.

GOODWIN: It's a dead end.

SHEETS: It's an absolutely dead end. When you have big universities and big art schools and departments in colleges that are without direction, without objective, without philosophy, it is a dead end. There has to be a meaning, and the meaning must be connected with real people and real situations and not the snobbish stupidity of our average art critic of today.

GOODWIN: That's a pretty profound thought.

SHEETS: I may be getting way off the beam here, but I feel it so deeply because I love, more than anything else, to see things happen. To me nothing is as thrilling as seeing a painting or a piece of sculpture or a building or a beautiful bowl or some weaving that I can say unhesitating, "I wish to God I had done that." Nothing

thrills me as much as this. If you're an artist, I think this is the only philosophy in art that amounts to anything. Above all, nothing excites me as much as having a young person develop into a total person and become a real expression of the thoughts that we're talking about. I've seen it so many times in the last thirty years particularly, out of the fifty years of teaching: the last thirty years I've seen so many young people that are doing exciting things all over the world.

GOODWIN: Has your philosophy of art education changed dramatically over the years?

SHEETS: No, I don't think it has. I think it's clarified, so that I can say it now in a way that I couldn't have said it thirty years ago. Certainly thirty years ago I felt it, but I was a hell of an inarticulate guy for a hell of a long time. When I went to Scripps, I was scared to death of what they called a lecture. Now, I didn't mind teaching in a class--but the minute I had to get up and give an art history lecture or in the humanities particularly (which I want to talk about a great deal when we talk about Scripps), I was absolutely scared, ossified. I think it was in the third month, the president of the college came to me and said, "We're going to have a series of three lectures. You're going to give the first one, the architect who designed the building is going to give the second one, and our professor of architecture is going to give the

third one. We're going to invite 200 distinguished guests for dinner and a series of three art lectures, and you're first." Well, I came as near expiring as I have ever. I went away for a week in the mountains, and I died twenty times every night waking up in a cold sweat about this thing. If it hadn't been for my wife, who was far better educated in English that I was, I would have really died. I had some ideas, but she took some of the stuttering out in helping me prepare this thing. It was a ghastly experience, but it was one of the best experiences I ever had because it forced me to do things I never would have done if I had not gone to Scripps.

GOODWIN: We will talk about Scripps in some depth. Let's speak a little while longer about Chouinard. Did the basic atmosphere of the school change, say, in the middle thirties, as opposed to the atmosphere you experienced as a student?

SHEETS: No, I think that Chouinard was extremely wonderful in the years from 1925, when I was there, until, really, the war started. I think of Mrs. Chouinard's original dedication, along with Chamberlain and some of the people that worked with her in the start of that school: I think they were so determined to build a good school. And when you think of it without any support except the income from tuition--there was no support at all.

GOODWIN: How much was tuition, by the way?

SHEETS: Oh, my goodness. I think my first year, I believe

it was $165. There were not over eighty students in the school, and that paid the faculty and the rent. There wasn't any money left over. In fact, I think I told you I did lots of odd jobs and things to even help pay for my tuition. So I guess I was about one of three or four people who were given any help financially. But the thing that just amazed me during all those years--and we had some marvelous teachers in the thirties . . . .

GOODWIN: Who were some of those people?

SHEETS: Well, I think of Phil Dike and Donald Graham and Jepson, and many of the kids that were students with me became very, very top teachers by the middle thirties, and they went on into the forties. Phil Dike had become the head of all color for Disney. He was quite independent financially. It was a great job. He did a fantastic job at Disney Studios. But he loved that school so much that he came down and taught. In fact, Disney was so dependent upon Chouinard, all of his first animators were students of ours at Chouinard. When Disney really got going, he joined with Chouinard in supporting drawing classes, to teach people not just animation, but to give them the background. There was a wonderful relationship in the early days between Disney and Chouinard. We were all very close friends. Then [Rico] Lebrun taught there. I think Lebrun was there for at least three years before the war. I wish I could put it together--maybe later,

some of the other names--but there were some remarkable people teaching there in those days. Of course, they also had marvelous classes in fashion and costume design. Edith Head was teaching, even, in those days. She taught right up until Chouinard literally closed its doors and became Cal Arts. Edith Head was a very faithful disciple. There were so many people that really worshipped what Chouinard did for them, as it did for each of us as individuals. It had a dedication, and it never did get so darn big, until the war came--I mean until after the war when the GIs came back. Then it became a factory, like Otis and big universities and so many of them did. They suddenly jumped up to five, six, seven hundred people, and they had other buildings outlying and that kind of thing. I taught there until '39, night classes after '35, I think it was. I taught night classes until I became so involved with the air schools for the Air Force.

But in looking back, I remember that you moved into a tremendously exciting atmosphere when you walked into the school. The students were all business. There was no monkey business. Of course, they were far better dressed than they are today, and they came in with a great excitement. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

I think one of the main reasons that Chouinard was strong during those years is that Mrs. Chouinard never once backed away from the demand of a tremendous amount

of drawing, painting, and design, no matter what the students were going to do. Now, Chouinard never did push sculpture as hard as I think they should have. In fact, I think they had sculpture classes that would come and go. I was sorry that that wasn't made an absolutely adamant part to the same degree. I didn't feel it at the time, but later on, looking back, I would say that if they had a weakness, that was it. But a student knew that they had to go into that drawing class, and if they didn't draw that figure, and learn to draw it well enough to go into the second year, then they were going to be out of the school. They were as tough as any college I've ever seen. Not by the ordinary grade thing. We looked over portfolios twice a semester, and I remember those long sessions of the drawing teachers getting together. I was both drawing and painting, so I'd meet for sometimes two days with the drawing group, and we'd look over every portfolio. We would give warnings or just say, "Out."

GOODWIN: Some students were asked to leave?

SHEETS: Oh, absolutely. Or were given a chance to come back and maybe just take drawing before they would be allowed to go on with their course. Because the design students, particularly--those who wanted to go into costume and then to just pure design, fabric and that kind of thing--they didn't see the point. But the point was they needed it more than anybody. It's so hard for

students who haven't had the experience to know how important it is, but that was the thing that grand old woman never once backed down on. Oh, she was a terror. She was the sweetest, most wonderful person, if everybody behaved. But if they didn't, God, boy, look out. She was tough. Oh, I loved her with a passion. Her whole staff reflected that. It had a great spirit, and they really believed in these things.

GOODWIN: How long did she stay with the school?

SHEETS: Well, it was well into the forties, late forties, early fifties, I think. When I became director of Otis, I really felt terrible about this because I made her very unhappy. I tried to explain it to her, but I don't think she ever really did understand it. Then I think it was about 1951 or -2 that she had a semistroke. She had to leave the school, and she never was back after that, although they paid great respect to her, and it was Disney money that kept the school going entirely. They had no other backing at all. I know that Disney put in over two or three hundred thousand a year for something like seven or eight years until the school was stopped. He did that in gratitude for what Chouinard had meant to him and the fact that he thought we needed that kind of an art school. That's why he wanted to build this new, great Disney thing [Cal Arts], which has never done any of the things that he wanted it to do. That's another episode in my life.

GOODWIN: Right, we'll get to that.

SHEETS: Yeah, I know.

GOODWIN: Let's talk about Scripps.

SHEETS: Well, Scripps was a great, new, wide adventure into the far beyond for me, never having been to college--as they say, being one of the unwashed. I first had an exhibit at Scripps a year before I went to Scripps, with no thought at the time when I had this exhibit that I would ever be connected with Scripps. I had an exhibition of paintings, and then the head of the department, a wonderful fellow by the name of Morgan Padelford, called me and said that the president of the college wanted to talk to me about doing a mural at Scripps. I went out, had lunch with Morgan and the president and two or three of the trustees, and they showed me this beautiful wall in a dining room. At that time, I think they had two dining rooms for four dormitories. It was a beautiful end wall, and they had several ideas. I was very excited about it. We talked about it at length, oh, maybe over a period of about three or four months. We settled on the price, and we settled on the material and all the rest of it. As I was very involved for the moment, I said, "Well, I can start it in about three or four months and make the design." It was the middle of that period of three or four months that the president called me one day and asked me if I would consider teaching for one year at Scripps while

Morgan Padelford went on a honeymoon to Europe. I didn't know enough about it to be scared of the idea of teaching at college, because, you know, I love teaching, and I enjoyed young people. I was only twenty-three and a half or something like that--I don't remember exactly what it was, twenty-four maybe. My wife and I went out and had dinner with the president and his wife and some of the board, and they invited me to become an assistant professor for one year.

Well, we went out, and the first thing that we ran into we couldn't find a house. Claremont was such a tiny little place, which just had never grown over above its needs, and there simply wasn't a house. So we decided to build a house, though it was the Depression. We traded a lot that my wife's mother gave us for a lot in Claremont, even. The lot was in Los Angeles, supposedly a more valuable lot, but it turned out eventually it wasn't because it became part of the growing black community, and this one turned out to be one of the best lots in Claremont. You can't believe this, but for $3,300 I built a fantastic house. These are things that you can't comprehend. I borrowed all $3,300 from a savings and loan on the strength of the $1,000 equity on the lot, which in those days was a lot of money, they thought. We built a beautiful house, with no thought that we were going to be there more than one year, but that we could sell it and it was a

lovely house. A friend of mine and I designed it and built it.

GOODWIN: Right near the campus?

SHEETS: Oh, it's about six blocks from the campus, but just a knockout. To give you some idea about that house, later I added a wing underneath the studio. In that house there were two bedrooms, two baths, kitchen, dining room, a huge living room, and a studio that was as big as the living room separate from the house, which were 24 x 14 each. Later, when we had more children, I pushed the studio up in the air and built a wing right underneath it of three more bedrooms and two baths. That cost another, about $2,900. The last time that house sold, it sold for $69,000. The same house. It had a two-car garage. That shows you what inflation is like.

Well, anyway, I went to Scripps, and it was the most exciting thing in so many ways, except I had no good place to teach. I was working in regular classrooms; they didn't have an art room of any kind. Light was coming from all directions, and there were too many students. I had some marvelous young men from Pomona who came up, Milfred Zornes and Tom Craig, guys that became very good painters, were in my first class out there, and there were lots of girls from Scripps and Pomona and every place else. Well, I managed to get through that year, and before the year was out they asked me to stay on. They said that they

needed both Morgan and they needed me, as well as the man who was teaching architecture and doing most of the art history lectures.

Well, a very interesting thing happened, and it changed my life. In the middle of or during the first semester, I kept hearing the name Hartley Alexander. This name was always spoken with such awe and such sort of reverence by every member of the faculty and the students. I found out by just listening long enough that he was a professor of philosophy and that he was on leave. He was back at the Radio [City Music Hall], New York, laying out all of the art for Radio City, choosing the artists, the sculptors, the painters, the mosaicists, and so forth. Instinctively, being very young and very dumb, I developed a kind of--and it sounds very stupid--a dislike for a man that I didn't know. Well, what the hell is a philosopher doing back in New York, laying out art, and choosing artists? What's he doing this kind of thing for? Well, he was a great friend of Bertram Goodhew, the designer of the Radio City Music Hall, and he also had worked with him on the Nebraska state capitol, which is quite famous for what they did in that same respect. Anyway, I instinctively thought he was getting way over into my kind of territory, and what the hell was he doing that for? Yet I was so impressed by the spirit that everybody had toward this man that I couldn't wait to meet him. They said he was coming back second semester.

GOODWIN: It sounds like you were going to challenge him to a duel. [laughter]

SHEETS: Well, it's just the thing that only a young person would ever feel. I mean anybody in his right mind wouldn't feel that way. But I had been so involved with my world, as I said, I hadn't been to college, and the academic thing seemed to me pretty extracurricular. It really wasn't terribly important. I thought the artists should have more time in the art classes, and I had some damned good students. Anyway, at the first faculty meeting after the break in the semesters, sitting over on one side was a man who looked exactly like an Iowa farmer. He didn't look very prepossessing. He just looked intelligent. It wasn't until some things were being debated in the faculty that I heard him open his mouth. After he had said about five sentences, I knew that it was Hartley Alexander. I instinctively knew that this man was really very special. He didn't make any loud anything. He was not one of these table pounders. He just had more good sense and more insight and more common sense than anybody I'd ever met. I was so impressed by him and went up afterward and introduced myself, and he said he was glad to meet me and he was anxious to see what we were doing and so forth, that he was tremendously interested in the art department. A few weeks later, he and some of the other older members of the faculty came for a housewarming when we moved in. They brought us a lot of

lovely little house presents and so forth, and we had a marvelous time. We became extremely close friends.

It wasn't until toward the end of the year that they were at our house one night for dinner, and we'd had a marvelous evening. This was during the time that you couldn't buy liquor of any kind, and I had found a good source for some wine. They all loved wine, and we had had quite a bit of wine at dinner. My wife had cooked a beautiful dinner, and we were sitting around just talking about things in general. Of course, there's no one as bright as a second-year art student or a first-year teacher in college, and at the opportune moment I made some mention of the fact that I thought that colleges weren't very well organized. I had some very talented young people, and I thought that they should be given a lot more time in art and that I didn't see where all these humanities and some of these other things fitted into the degree that the college seemed to think they should. There was a moment of silence, which wasn't even painful to me because I was so pontifical at that moment I wouldn't have known, when suddenly Dr. Alexander said, "Well, Millard, the trouble with you artists is, you're not educated." If somebody had taken a twenty-five-pound sledge and hit me right smack between the eyes, they couldn't have hit me any harder. His sweet wife, Nellie, stood up about that time and said, "Hartley, you have an eight o'clock lecture and

we must go." And they all departed.

Well, I never slept a wink all night. I knew he was right, but on the other hand, I think I told you, I had been accepted at Pomona College and then had gone to an art school because everyone advised me to do that if I was going to be an artist. I thought to myself, "Well, how does an artist get an education, if you can't get it here in an environment like this with enough art and so forth?" I really was upset.

His office just happened to be next to mine, up on the second floor of Balch Hall. Needless to say, I was there at seven-thirty the next morning, knowing his habit of coming to his office about twenty minutes before his eight o'clock lecture, picking up his notes, and going down to his class. So at seven-thirty I was there, and about seven-forty I heard him patter down the hall, and I popped out, and I walked up to him as he put his key into the door. I said, "Dr. Alexander, you said something last night that really shook me right to the bottom of my feet." I said, "I've thought about it all night. I haven't gone to sleep. I know you're right. But," I said, "I want to know how an artist should get an education under today's setup." He looked at me with this incredible look, and two of the biggest tears I've ever seen in my life came down his cheeks. He turned the key in the door, and he said, "Come in." His voice was very

husky. He walked over to the telephone in his office, and he called down to the registrar's office. He said, "Please dismiss my class this morning. I'm not lecturing." That man sat there and talked to me until five o'clock in the afternoon. He completely revolutionized--he completely opened a world that I didn't know could exist, with the most incredible combination of piercing criticism and unlimited love, the kind of a guy that you felt socked you on the jaw, and just as you started to fall he lovingly held you from falling. That's the way I always felt about Hartley, all my life, as long as he lived. We were incredibly close friends. He just opened up vistas. He opened up so many. Well, I just didn't know these things existed.

GOODWIN: What did he want you to study? Did he prescribe certain studies for you?

SHEETS: No, he really talked about what an educated person was, and why an artist should be an educated person and not just a craftsman. They should have certainly a sense of purpose and direction and meaning and their objectives should be so much more than the normal objectives that artists had. It was meant in the most loving way, never in a mean way at all. He didn't mean it in a way the night before. I knew it. But it still was a sock in the puss for a guy that hadn't had too many, you know, flops up to that point. But that was the most

marvelous thing that ever happened to me. I was so moved and stirred by it. We never even realized it was lunch time. It was five o'clock when we discovered it was five o'clock. I said, "Well, could I ever talk to you again sometime?" He said, "Well, why don't you just set aside Tuesday nights for a while, and you come over to the house, and we'll talk. Be there at seven. We'll just talk."

I went over to his house every Tuesday night for about two months before I had the guts to say, "Can't I bring some friends of mine, because I feel so selfish and so completely wrong in being here alone? What you're saying would mean so much to so many of my friends who are artists that I couldn't begin to tell you." He said, "Well, if they would like to come, it's all right." That started what lasted about six years. Every Tuesday night, with very few exceptions, I never missed--only once or twice when he was ill. It became a thing that no one ever really was invited to, but if they wanted to come and it just turned out that they wanted to come, we never knew whether there were going to be eight people there or thirty. In six years and a half I never heard him repeat himself. In six years artists came from as far away as San Francisco.

I remember one night a friend of mine, a sculptor from San Francisco, came down in a semitruck, and he had a piece of sculpture that weighed 1,000 pounds in stone.

Very often artists would bring things there, and he wouldn't give you an ordinary kind of criticism, but he would talk around the subject, and sometimes he would be very direct. I made innumerable mural designs. At that time I was getting all kinds of big jobs, but the only guy I really wanted to please was Hartley. I thought if I could please him, then I wasn't worried about what anybody else thought, because he had such an open spirit and such a fantastic idea about, you know, what art should be, yet never constricting it. This night this fellow brought this big piece of sculpture down. It took five of us to carry the damn thing. Well, I think it took seven of us. We got some big wood, finally, to put under it and carried it in. We sat it down in the middle of this living room floor. It was an old house, and I thought, "My God, it will go right through this termite floor." It sat there. Now, there were about twenty-five people that night around in a big circle, and that thing was sitting right there in the middle. He never mentioned it once, not once. I became more embarrassed and more embarrassed. I hadn't invited him there, but he was one of my closest friends, the sculptor in San Francisco, Jacques Schneer, a very good sculptor, actually. I became more embarrassed and more embarrassed because I thought, God, what can I ever say to my friend?

So when it was all over, and it was always at nine-

fifteen, Mrs. Alexander would walk in with a big tray of hot chocolate or coffee or what everybody wanted, and we'd have about fifteen minutes of cookies and chocolate, and then everybody would leave. So at nine-thirty we got a rustle and worked like hell to get this thing back in the truck. We finally got it on the truck, and I said, "Jacques, I'm so embarrassed." I said, "It's the first time this has ever happened. I don't understand it." He said, "Millard, I don't understand what you're talking about." He said, "I have never had as great a criticism in my life."

You see, this was that man's capacity. He got through to the guy and I was too self-conscious of the situation to really probably listen as I should have. He said, "I've never in my life ever had such a criticism." He said, "It's worth twenty trips from San Francisco." Now that's a teacher, isn't it? That was Hartley Alexander. That guy was so incredible.

GOODWIN: What are some of the things you talked about? Or was it a discussion? Was it mostly a monologue?

SHEETS: It was always a discussion, but the discussion was nearly always answering questions. Or sometimes he'd let you go a ways, and then he would say that you're on the right track.

GOODWIN: The Socratic method.

SHEETS: But to not repeat yourself in six and a half years . . . .

GOODWIN: Well, did he talk about politics or campus activities?

SHEETS: There wasn't anything in the world he didn't talk about. He knew the history of art better than anybody I ever knew. He was utterly at home. Of course by this time we were all pretty well involved with all these things, so that it was so much fun to be able to talk with a guy who could talk with such excitement about Greece or Egypt or Rome or Renaissance or Dutch seventeenth century painters. It didn't make any difference to him. Except the modern world--he knew nothing about it.

Now, this is the truth of his capacity. They had the first great van Gogh show in San Francisco about a year before Hartley died, and I had never seen more than four or five van Goghs in my life, which I had seen at the Hatfield Galleries and a couple in New York. So I wanted to go up with my wife, and we invited Hartley and Nellie to go with us. We drove up to San Francisco, and next morning arrived at the Palace of the Legion of Honor museum at opening time, nine o'clock. They had about 200 drawings and about 200 paintings; it was the first great show that ever came to America. I had told him about van Gogh, and he said, "Well, who is this man?" I said, "Well, he lived in the late part of the nineteenth century, and he was a postimpressionist." It didn't mean much to him. I said, "But he painted his gut, and you know, a great

guy, and I think you ought to see the show." I think he went up there mainly because we loved to be together. Well, though they were so much older than we were, we just had a ball anytime we were together. We had lots of fun. We had to stop one night on the way up because in those days it took a long time to drive. It was the better part of two days, at least.

So we got up there and went to the opening. We went in, and the four of us were moving along, looking at the first group of paintings. Then Hartley kind of swung over and went over to the other wall, and I was so excited about these things--God, I had to talk to somebody--and I moved over where he was to say something about it. For the first time in my life, he turned his back on me. After about two of those things I realized that he didn't want to talk to me about anything. Well, we wandered through there, about six big galleries or seven. It was a huge, huge show. Finally, I kept running into Mrs. Alexander and Mary--they were together--and they were just so excited, and I was terribly excited. Finally, Mrs. Alexander, because he had a bad heart condition, said, "I'm worried about Hartley. I haven't seen him." I said, "I saw him about an hour ago." This was almost two and a half hours after we went in there. She said, "If we stay right here, if he comes from that direction we can catch him, and would you do it the other way?" I went the other way. Well, we couldn't find him.

So I went out finally to the steps of the museum. And way off--I can still remember the spot--he was sitting looking out into space. I walked up to him, and I said, "Hartley, are you all right?" "Yes, I'm all right, I'm all right." I said, "Are you ill? I'm really worried about you. Are you ill?" "Oh, no, no, I'm not ill." I said, "Well, what's the trouble?" "Well," he said, "I have just seen one of the greatest autobiographies ever written." Now that was his response to van Gogh.

He came back and wrote an essay on that exhibition that I want to tell you was one of the greatest things, I think, ever written about van Gogh. It's just a fantastic essay. If I can, I'm going to get a copy of that. His son lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico; he's head of the philosophy department there [University of New Mexico]. I want to get a copy, because we had a copy and I gave it to Scripps Library, and something happened to it there--which I can't believe, but it did. I'd like to get another copy of that and give another one to Scripps. It's an incredible essay. It's so much of what we're talking about: the real thing, not the verbiage, not the tickling up of cutting off ears and that kind of thing. It's an incredibly beautiful thing, a completely natural, instant reaction from a man who wasn't really accustomed to the whole modern development, really. He wasn't opposed to it, he wasn't fighting it, but he just had never become

really involved in it because of his great background.

But it was Hartley who really conceived of the whole concept of Scripps College, which was basically three years of required humanities, double courses, two out of the five courses required of everyone. It was the first college in the United States to be based on the humanities because it started this in 1927.

GOODWIN: It was a women's college?

SHEETS: Yes, it still is. It was the first college in the United States that really had this kind of an approach, where a student in the freshman year started with ancient history and came up chronologically to modern times. Roman empire, I think. Various professors in the separate fields coordinated in presenting the course. They each lectured, and then they had the discussion groups. So there would be four or five professors in each of the three humanities, the freshman, sophomore, and junior years. Art was never separated from the reality of what went on in politics, in religion, and every other field, that everything grew naturally together--as anyone who knows anything about the humanities understands, but it was a big experiment in those days. Of course, I thought it was not hogwash, but I didn't think it was that important until I became involved in it and sat through all three years of the whole course, hearing the other people lecture and coming away a totally different person in a sense of relating it

to my life, which I never could have done otherwise.

That's why I think we turned out so many marvelous students in Claremont in those days--the fact that it was so different having a student from Pomona or Scripps, for example. A Pomona student took a spot course in history over a year and a spot course in economics over a year and maybe religion or philosophy or something else. You were at home talking with any student at Scripps at all times in the history of art because they had had it. They had had a different feeling about it. It isn't that history of art is everything, but if you want to get started off, it's a good thing to have some background in the fantastic body of knowledge that we've come out of. These kids were so influential on the other students that other students from Pomona audited a fantastic number of these humanities courses. The graduate students came into the humanities courses. When we developed our big graduate school, which we did after two or three years, that was all Alexander's original concept and the reason he came to Scripps. He was the head of the philosophy department at the University of Nebraska and had a job for the rest of his life at a very high, much higher stipend than he ever got at Scripps, I'm sure. But he came there because the president agreed that they would build the thing he'd always dreamed of as the basic curriculum of Scripps. It was an amazing experience, really.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

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GOODWIN: Last session we began to discuss the Scripps College experience, and Mr. Sheets profiled Professor Hartley Alexander. We were just beginning to discuss the need to build some studio spaces for art work, since there weren't any at the time.

SHEETS: George, it was quite an experience for me, never having been to college, to go to Scripps--as I told you at our last session, presumably for one year--and then to become so excited about being there, and the college's wish to have me remain. I became deeply involved with everything about the college--the humanities program and, of course, the art department. The most difficult thing of all for me, having had only experience in an art school--with ample technical facilities, studio space, and so forth--we found ourselves working classrooms which were beautiful classrooms but utterly unsuited as painting studios. There was light from all sides, artificial light that was very glaring and spotty, as far as studio light is concerned. So I prevailed upon the president to the best of my ability to help us find some kind of temporary solution to the problems.

And it's hard to believe, but in those days I figured out that we could build an enormous barn for about $3,300.

There was an old olive grove on the edge of the campus, so I thought we could hide this in the middle of that grove and nobody would ever know that it was there. "After the Depression is over, if it ever ends, why, we can build an art department." But I asked for $3,300. I remember the day very clearly. The president, Dr. [Ernst] Jaqua, said, "Well, Millard, I have a discretionary fund which I can give you for $3,300." He said, "We can't afford it, but I have the right to do that." He said, "But you are making the most dreadful mistake in the world because what you call a 'temporary' building isn't going to be 'temporary.' It's going to be there ten or fifteen years from now, if we're still here operating. That's just the way things work. I strongly advise against it." I said, "Dr. Jaqua, what are we going to do? I cannot teach. We need more staff people to be added. We need to give these students the fair kind of treatment. We just can't work where we are." He said, "Be trusting and, above all, be patient for one year." I said, "Well, what does that mean? That you're going to help me raise money for the whole thing?" He said, "No. We won't work that way. I want you to set up a Scripps College Fine Arts Foundation, a supporting group, asking for nothing but giving everything. I'll give you the $3,300, and you try to arrange a series of exhibitions. I know we don't have a proper place to have an exhibition, but," he said, "you arrange the most

distinguished little groups of things that you can arrange and change every month, and we'll get fifteen, twenty, thirty members, maybe pay ten dollars a year for this membership. But we'll spend some money for real speakers, and we'll put on an exciting program and get people interested in art. If you do that it will come about without ever asking for anything."

Well, it seemed far off and unrealistic to me, but I admired the man so much as an organizer and in the way he built the college, the kind of staff he brought together, that I didn't have much choice except to agree with him. So I started out planning the exhibits through the next year, and I worked out a very careful program for eight exhibits. Having just read Lust for Life by Irving Stone, I was intrigued with the possibility of getting him to give the first lecture. I didn't know him--I didn't claim to be a literary critic--but I enjoyed the book so much. I thought if I could get Irving Stone with his enthusiasm, he would really bring to life this whole idea of what we were trying to do. Fortunately, he had just moved to Los Angeles, and I was able to get him. He, I think, was as happy to have us ask him as we were to get him, because his book had only barely been on the market, and he had not become the successful author financially that he became almost immediately. So for a sum total of fifty dollars, or thirty-five--I never could remember for sure

which it was he asked for a fee--we brought Irving Stone to Scripps College. He gave a marvelous lecture.

From that we went into other shows, and one of them was a show in Pasadena which we arranged in the house of Mrs. [Josephine] Everett, who had been a collector for a long time of painting in California, and who had a lovely house and gallery near the old Vista [del Arroyo] Hotel here in Pasadena. She invited me to have an exhibition of my work and to speak to a group of her friends about what our hopes were for the future at Scripps. I did, and at that lecture a guest of one of the women that Mrs. Everett had invited as her guest came up to me after the lecture and said, "I'm very much interested in this thing that you're talking about and what you hope to do at Scripps. I don't live in California; I live in Montclair, New Jersey. I'm going to be returning the day after tomorrow. Could I come to the college tomorrow?" I assured her she would be most welcome if she came, and next day she walked into my classroom and, seeing the forest of easels and people, the confusion and the bad lighting and everything else, she said, "My, you do need this first unit, as you call it. What is it going to cost?" Well, we had no plans. We hadn't had any estimates. I thought we should go immediately to the president's office, which we did, and without any announcement to him or any prewarning of any kind, he accepted us into his office.

I explained what had happened, that Mrs. Lang was very much interested in the possibility of what we were going to do. She asked the question immediately, "How much is it going to cost for this first unit?" I swallowed very hard and I said, "I think around $37,500." (Because I figured if we could build a good barn for $3,300, we ought to get a fairly decent building for $37,500.) She smiled in a nice way and looked out the window, and she said, "Well, I would like to do this. I will send you a check. I'm leaving in the morning, but I will send you a check."

Well, of course, I walked out of there three feet off the ground, so excited about the prospect of getting out of these holes that we were in where we were trying to teach. I went back to my class and went home and was telling my wife excitedly about this woman that had come out of the blue, out of the sky, to make this offer, when the telephone rang. It was President Jaqua. He said, "Millard, I know how excited you are about the possibility of this thing, but," he said, "I must tell you that I've known a great many people, and I'm afraid there's a good, strong possibility that this woman falls into a category that we think of as delusions of grandeur. I am really afraid that she is one of these people. She probably gives millions of dollars away every month and probably means everything that she ever says, but of course hasn't

the ability to do it. It was too easy. She volunteered it entirely; she wasn't asking for anything." He said she really didn't have time to get into the meat of it, and he said, "I just can't believe that it can be real."

But happily, I can say that the next morning at ten o'clock in the mail came a certified check for $37,500. Well, it's a long and interesting story, but I'll just brief it by saying that I wrote to her immediately and told her how happy I was, and did she have any advice, suggestions at all, as to what might be included in this building? The only letter she ever wrote me was a return letter in which she indignantly said she was fairly sorry that she had given me the money, that she felt that I had no right to ask anyone if I didn't want to stick my neck on the block and take full responsibility for the decisions, that she thought maybe she'd made a mistake. Well, I sent her photographs of the construction, and then more beautiful photographs. I made up a wonderful album after the building [Lang Hall] was finished and the students were in it and working so beautifully with the new staff that we'd added. It made a fantastic impact upon the college to have this opportunity. I sent her a beautiful album that I made up. I never heard from her or never had any thank you or go to hell. I think it was about two and a half years later, I was in the middle of this beautiful, big studio with a class that was probably twice the size it should have been,

a big painting studio, when I looked up as the door opened, and standing in the doorway was this same gentle, little woman--same dress, same hat, same wonderful smile--and she motioned toward me. I, of course, immediately went to see her. "My, but we are crowded," she said. "I guess it's about time for the second unit." Unsolicited, completely out of the blue, here she was, and it was such an exciting thing. She said, "All right, now what's it going to cost this time?" Well, this time we were very well organized. We had a master plan, of course, that the architects at the college and I had worked out for the whole art building. We had actual cost estimates for the next unit, the second, the middle unit of the three units that we built. I said, "This time it's going to be a great deal more." Of course, inflation had already started, and also we were adding a very much larger chunk. This time I think if I remember correctly, I told her it was around $180,000. We had actual estimates at that time. She said, "Well, I'm very anxious to get this down the road, so I will send you a check," and she did. This time there was no question about delusions of grandeur. We knew that she would. The same thing followed: more wonderful excitement and adding to the building, adding to the staff. Of course I kept her informed.

It wasn't until perhaps three and a half years later that she arrived again. She had never been out to see the

buildings at all, but she suddenly appeared again. I won't say it was in the same dress this time, but there she was and very excited about what she saw. We had lunch with the president and several of the staff, and everyone had a chance to express their gratitude and appreciation for what she had done in such an unselfish way. I might say also that she had insisted her name should not be used in any way on the building. It was always an anonymous gift. I had quite a time persuading her even to let me introduce her to the staff. The president and I up to this time were the only people who knew who she was and had ever really talked to her.

GOODWIN: Madame X.

SHEETS: Madame X. The most charming, quiet, lovely person, without any affectation, just as natural as an old shoe. Well, this time she looked into the matter very thoroughly, because now we were talking in the neighborhood of around $700,000 to complete the whole thing with all the galleries and the whole business. After I explained the whole thing to her and gave her the budget, she said, "All right, I want to see this through. But we're going to do it differently this time. This time I'm going to give you matching money. Whatever the people here raise, up to half of it I will match. I'm sure that you will have no difficulty getting the money. I could do it all, but I think now the people here should be involved very definitely,

so that they don't think that it's always being done by outsiders."

I gave a talk to the foundation at the next monthly meeting and explained that this lovely woman who had given us our great bequests before had come back to urge us to finish the building, and that she had made this offer. All I did was state that the offer had been made. We never directly asked for a dime, and in less than two weeks, we had the money to do the whole thing. It came in voluntarily, ranging from twenty-five dollar gifts up to $25,000 gifts. It just seemed to come right up out of the ground, and it's a lesson that I really think I learned and I love because people who really want to do something are so different than people you corner and ask for something. You can get them excited and get them to believe in what you're trying to do.

The foundation had become a marvelous institution by this time. It operated quite separately from the college. The members had their own officer, they had their own budgets, they had their own reason for existence, but they didn't control the college, and we didn't control them. It was a wonderful thought that the president had when he dreamed this up, that it should be an independent body that would simply believe in the same objectives. I met with them every month in their board meetings, and of course we had our regular meetings with their group. By

this time the membership had grown to almost 500. We had people coming from San Diego, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Pasadena, and Beverly Hills, because there was activity and excitement there and we had good exhibits.

I remember we started in those days, I think, the most exciting series of national ceramic shows. Ceramics was just coming back into reality. After the craftsmen had neglected it for a long time, some absolutely marvelous artists all over the country were doing ceramics. We developed a very fine ceramic department at Scripps. So each year we put on, in the spring, a national ceramics show, by invitation. To give you some idea of the excitement that developed out there--without trying to sell, because we never would have assumed the position of being a sales gallery, and we didn't take any commission--we sold an average of $5,000 worth of ceramics at every one of these shows, which was an incredible amount of money for just a beautiful exhibition. We put on the shows with a lot of flair because it was at the time that the azaleas were in bloom, and we had a fantastic gardener at Scripps in those days who had these great azalea bushes. We could put the pots up on stands ten feet high, and they would hang clear to the floor with cascades of the most beautiful white or pink blooms.

GOODWIN: Did you actually handle the installations?

SHEETS: Oh, I did every bit of that installation. I

used to haul the material and put it up myself, eventually with the help of a few students and eventually the help of a staff member. But for something like fifteen years, I did this whole thing alone, which was exciting. I think it was one of the most interesting parts of being at Scripps, to get to borrow great things and to have the galleries where we could put shows on properly with excellent lighting.

In those days it was so much easier to borrow important things. Today collectors have become more cautious, as I think they should become, because the danger in shipping and the carelessness in handling art is really shocking. I can say, fortunately, we never had any damage during all those years, but I used to have my heart in my mouth half the time driving through traffic, carrying incredibly valuable things. People like [Walter] Arensberg and many others loaned me some of their priceless things because they knew that I had the same feeling they did about their works. I borrowed things from all over the world, really, for some of our exhibitions.

GOODWIN: Have you ever been active in ceramics yourself?

SHEETS: I've done just enough to love it, but I never really have done anything of any consequence. I used to turn a little on a wheel, and I used to decorate bowls quite a bit that some of the staff members would throw. We had wonderful sessions. The staff sometimes would work

one night a week for maybe six months. We'd get excited and do a lot of things. I happen to be very, very keen about ceramics, and I think that the majority of the collection that my wife and I have in our home is really ceramic. It's mostly sculpture, but it's also many great pots and various sculptures from all over the world.

But the fun about that whole exhibition program was that it was tied so completely into both the art teaching program and the humanities program. I think that the reason that Scripps meant so much to me, not only as a marvelous environment in which to get an education--because I really hadn't had, as I told you, anything like a formal education--was the humanities program. Did we mention that much previously?

GOODWIN: You discussed how Professor Hartley Alexander designed the curriculum.

SHEETS: Well, I won't go back into the detail of how the staff worked on an integrated concept that was required for the first three years, but I think the fun was that the Scripps students who had the required background were so easy to talk to in a painting class or a sculpture class or any other kind of a class. Certainly in art history, they had a background that the student who had only had a smattering of a course here and there in art history or something else never had. Of course we had students from all the colleges. So it was outstanding

to see the difference in the way they reacted and the way they felt at home in the world of art. I know you had a question to ask.

GOODWIN: Yeah. You didn't name the secret donor.

SHEETS: Oh, I didn't? Well, when we finished the final building, it was like wrestling with an angel, believe me, to get her to finally allow us to use her name on the gallery only. Her name was Florence Rand Lang. She was from Montclair, New Jersey, but her history was so fabulous. She and her husband had given numerous buildings to Dartmouth College. I think they gave one to Cornell. They had given, I believe, the majority of the money--I'm not sure about this, but I think so--to the Montclair Museum. They had built wonderful cottages up in Cape Cod so that artists--I mean serious artists, not students but serious artists--could go and spend the summer at Cape Cod, rent free, to work in those cottages. She had almost a colony of artists up there, and she in no way tried to in any way direct them but simply made the place available to them. They were just genuinely genuine, wonderful, generous people, who did so much for everything they touched.

GOODWIN: What was the source of their wealth?

SHEETS: I have never known. I have never known what it was. I remember we even asked it one time, and I think she said her husband, who was then dead, was an industri-

alist. But she never said what kind of an industrialist, and I don't know that I have heard the name Lang associated with any particular business. They had a considerable amount of money, but never in any way did she seem pretentious about it. It was the most gentle, loving sort of way that she approached every problem. Later her granddaughter went to Scripps, and she was a very distinguished student, fortunately. There are sometimes unusual incidents when your best friend's child goes to college and it isn't always true that the child is the most bright. But she was a very bright young woman and was a great success at Scripps--not because her grandmother had given the art building but because she was just one whale of a good student.

GOODWIN: Were there art departments in any of the other Claremont Colleges?

SHEETS: Yes, rightly so. Pomona College, of course, had an art department before we started this department at Scripps, but their emphasis had been on music. When I was brought to Scripps, the idea was that we would develop an art department at Scripps that would serve, at that time, only the two colleges, Scripps and Pomona, the same way that the music department served both colleges. Now, this was for students who were more seriously interested in art. They felt that they needed an art department for the average student, and that was absolutely right. We

couldn't have handled all of the students that should have had some art experience. But for those who wanted to major in art, who wanted to come there and deliberately come there because of the art, we were the semiprofessional approach to that problem.

Some of the most distinguished people, I believe, were brought to Scripps. I had the pleasure of bringing them from New York, from various parts of the country: Albert Stewart, the sculptor; Henry Lee McFee, a very distinguished painter; Phil Dike, who I'd not only gone to school with but who had been an associate in so many ways. When he gave up the directorship of all color and, really, design at Disney's, I brought him to Scripps. We had, over a period of years, an incredible group of architects and painters: James Chapin, the American painter, who was quite famous; Richard Petterson in ceramics; Ted Criley in architecture; Marian Stewart, who was Albert Stewart's wife, in weaving; Whitney Smith in architecture; Sueo Serisawa, the painter. These are all names I'm sure everyone is familiar with around here. They were, at one time or another, members of our staff, and our staff generally was around ten in number.

GOODWIN: It must have been the largest department in the college.

SHEETS: It was, really, because we were doing a tremendous amount of graduate work, which was the most exciting thing,

particularly after the war. As every institution was loaded with GI students, and as we had built a decent reputation for the art, we did attract some absolutely unbelievable talent from all over the country. The graduate work had been built up really on the backs of my original staff, who were never given any release time to do graduate work. They did it in addition to their undergraduate work for the same pay. But it developed to the point where we did have several graduate appointments, like Jean Ames and others, who, in addition to the names I've mentioned, were very important not only on the undergraduate level but particularly on the graduate level. It was an exciting group, and by this time we were serving four colleges, because two more colleges [Claremont and Harvey Mudd] had been added. It was quite right that it should have been that size staff.

GOODWIN: How was the graduate program designed? What were the features?

SHEETS: We deliberately moved away from art education, teacher education, that is the preparation of teachers to teach art. We felt that the universities were loaded with that problem, and we weren't too happy with the way it was being done. We decided to have a professional degree, a master of fine arts, with a minimum of two years of graduate work, with no assurance, of course, that two years would get the students the degree, but to insure

proficiency in at least one or two areas. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] We believed that a teacher should be a thorough craftsman and a well-trained artist, both aesthetically, technically, and certainly with a sense of the place an artist should serve in society. It was that general spirit that prevailed. We were extremely selective in looking at people's portfolios. Even though they were college graduates, if they didn't have the technical facility, we would recommend that they go to an art school for a year or two before they came to us. It worked out very well. In some instances we accepted students that had not been to college. They took a general cultural test which the college itself put on, not the art department. In two or three instances, some of the most distinguished people we turned out came through that route. So we weren't sticky about the number of units that they might have had behind them.

GOODWIN: How many graduate students were there at one time?

SHEETS: The number that seemed to prevail was around forty-five, which was a large group for a small college setup. We had quite a problem spacewise, even with all of our buildings, to handle the two programs. But one of the things that I think made it very good was that the excitement of the graduate work that was going on was so stimulating to the undergraduates as well as to the staff

that it made a tremendous difference in the undergraduate work. It just moved up so fast, and there was a real excitement through the whole place. You just felt you couldn't believe it could happen, but it did. Our summer sessions were very, very exciting. We did attract people from all over the country. We never let it get so large or out-of-hand, but we put it on almost like a humanities concept. It was a six-week, intensive, full-time, all-day course. Everyone in the summer session, regardless of what medium they chose to work in, sometimes two for the summer, went to an eight o'clock lecture.

GOODWIN: In the summer?

SHEETS: In the summer.

GOODWIN: Up and at 'em. [laughter]

SHEETS: Every one of the instructors--and there were generally six instructors for the summer, professors of various capacities (sometimes they were visiting artists)--each professor was expected to give one week of lectures in his field. Every student was required to take all of the six lectures, five days a week. Then they had a morning session of three hours, in one medium which they chose, and all afternoon, three hours again in another medium. Or they could stay straight through with one; it didn't matter. But the result is that that whole group always felt like a unit. The people seemed to respond so much to each other, and everybody was interested

in other people's growth, not merely the idea of going to courses and getting units. It was a unified experience. We did attract some marvelous teachers--college teachers, top high school art teachers--from all over the country, in addition to students who came then to continue on to get their degree. So it was a good, interesting cross section of excitement and activity in the country.

GOODWIN: Who have been some of the more prominent graduates of Scripps?

SHEETS: Well, I think of David Scott, now one of the directors of the National Gallery, who was a very fine painter, a marvelous young art historian. After he finished at Scripps, he went to Harvard and received his doctor's degree. Then he came back to Scripps and taught, and then, when I left the Scripps department, he became the head of the department. After that he went to the Smithsonian Institution as an assistant director of American art, and then became the director. Now he is at the National Gallery in Washington. Douglas McClellan, who is head of the art department at the University of California at Santa Cruz, was one of the men that came in on the cultural test side. He had not had college background. He had gone to, I think, Colorado Springs School of Art right after the war for a year, and then he came, studied with me, and with our staff in general. He was there on the GI Bill, which did not require that

he take this for a degree. We kept it open, I might say very clearly, for people that had talent. We were as interested in that as we were at the thought of a degree, certainly. Then he chose to go after a degree and took the cultural test, which they said was the highest test ever passed by an outsider in any field, which pleased me always. Then after David Scott retired as director, he became director of the Scripps art department and then went to Santa Cruz. Well, now those two have gone, you might say, the formal route, but out of the innumerable painters--I would have to get a list together, really--but we have designers in architecture and ceramics and weaving and tapestries and painting and sculpture, nationally distributed.

GOODWIN: I think you mentioned there were some Rome Prize winners.

SHEETS: Yes, well that was an interesting story. We had a young man by the name of Jack Zajac, of whom you may have heard. Jack Zajac called me on the telephone one morning, and he said, "I'm Jack Zajac," in this croaking voice. I said, "Well, fine." He said, "I'm working in the Fontana steel mills, and I'm sixteen. Somebody told me that if I wanted to study art, I should call you, so I'm calling you." So I said, "Well, Mr. Zajac, why don't you come over, and let's talk about it." We made an appointment. We had to make it on Saturday or Sunday,

because he was working. His father had been killed in an accident, and he was taking care of his mother, at age sixteen. He was about six feet tall, a great big gangling kid, and he brought over to show me about fifteen enormous canvases. I think the smallest was 3 x 4 feet, and from then on up into various sizes. Some of them were attempted copies of calendars. Some of them were the worst subjects in the world, done without any real knowledge, but with the most intense feeling. He didn't know what he had. He didn't know how bad it was; he didn't know how good it was. He hadn't the vaguest idea. But he was so excited about painting. I suggested that he come over to the college whenever he could. Was it possible to get on the graveyard shift or something and come over part of each day? And he arranged that. He went on the graveyard shift. He never knew it, but I paid his tuition, because I knew he couldn't afford it. I didn't want to ask the college at that time to do anything about it, and I could have very easily.

But he came over for about a year, and in one year everyone knew we had a real artist on our hands. He just bloomed. After one year of going to classes, which he really didn't like--he was just a natural--we gave him a room with one other student, and there he created all his material that won him the Prix de Rome. But he was there in the middle of our environment. The students were crazy

about him. I think we had freedom. We had some latitude that very few departments would have in being able to do this kind of thing, and do it with the college's full knowledge and acceptance.

It was while he was in his third year there, working very hard--and he worked unlimited hours. By this time he had even stopped working in the steel mill and was selling paintings, quite handily, enough to at least get by and take care of his mother, which is a pretty remarkable thing in itself at nineteen. I remember that Paul Manship, the sculptor, then chairman of the [American] Academy in Rome, came to visit Bert Stewart, and I showed him Jack's work. He took one look at it and said, "I think he should apply for the Prix de Rome." He did, and he won it. It was just one of those nice little fluke things that happen. He happened to visit at the right time and I don't think any of us would have thought particularly of Jack applying for the Rome scholarship. Well, he won it and, of course, has had a great history ever since. He's done some exciting things. I believe he's also teaching at Santa Cruz at the present time, part time. He goes to Italy each year and casts his bronzes.

GOODWIN: Did he actually study sculpture at Scripps?

SHEETS: Yes, he studied with Bert Stewart, as he studied painting with me. But he was a complete person himself. He was very thoughtful. He never fought a teacher. But

on the other hand, he didn't pay a hell of a lot of attention to the teacher. I've been very proud of the fact that what he has was within himself. It's the quality of his mind from the very beginning. He did learn the importance of discipline, and he did work very hard. I used to go in constantly when he was working in that room by himself and at his invitation give him criticism just in the most casual way. He was very thoughtful. I don't remember him ever saying he agreed or that he disagreed, but he went right on being Jack Zajac, which is what counted. He had that capacity. But we've had so many people that are, I think, equally distinguished in their own way. Of course, Roger Kuntz, who died recently, was one of our students. I should really prepare a list. I should have done that to give you some sense of who these people were.

GOODWIN: Today we're more conscious of women in art or even women artists. Were there many women graduate students at Scripps?

SHEETS: Yes, we had a very good percentage of women, as a matter of fact. We had, I would say, just about an even number of men and women--not by choice, but just by the fact that we had some marvelous women artists: painters, teachers, people who became very important teachers, people who have gone into every design field, motion pictures, architecture.

We taught architecture not as a formal course at

Scripps in the graduate school, but we had always good architects who were very creative, who really made architecture very much alive. Of course, I insisted that painters and sculptors take architecture at least one year to have some sense of the relationship between their work and architecture for their future. I know that this was a very important thing. I can't imagine an art department without a required course in, not history of architecture--we gave that in the humanities, of course; we had marvelous presentations of architecture historically--but applied courses, where they really became involved with using materials and understanding concepts of form and the whole idea of function. It's essential. It's a great discipline just as a discipline. But the relationship between architecture and what an artist needs is enormous. I think this is one of the great failings of so many art schools--and many universities and colleges, too--that they just don't push the necessity of understanding the relationship of these fields as you practice art.

I think it's exciting to say that people like Tom Van Sant was one of our students. Tom Van Sant went to Stanford for three years and came down mainly because he was a very good friend of mine, and his family and I had been connected for a long time. He came down and took a year, which he didn't even worry about as far as credit was concerned, at Pomona College, and he took art full time. Pomona was

very decent to allow him to do this. So he worked extremely hard that year, and he took sculpture. He worked in painting with me. He took design, and he took architecture. It was a great year. Then he went back to Stanford the next year and graduated, got his regular BA degree, and then came back to Otis, and he was one of the first two MFA students we turned out at Otis Art Institute. But the fact that he did get that start at Scripps with the undergraduate school, with architecure, has affected his life. He now is involved in everything that has to do with architecture. He's known internationally, he's worked in every medium, but he's emphasized sculpture more than painting, which is exciting.

I think if artists have a chance to work in a variety of media when they're in school, whether it's an art school or a college, and they get it right from the shoulder of someone that really knows--not just teaching a bunch of art theory--then they get in and really learn disciplines. Very often a student grows in a totally different direction than he thought he was going to go when he started out. It's a fact that if a person says, "I'm going to be a painter, and I don't want to do anything else," that often clouds his whole future. Because if he just would get in and learn the whole art language, it means not only more freedom, but perhaps a whole new world opens up for him. It certainly was in the case of Tommy Van Sant. I think it's a case certainly in Zajac. He started out not wanting

to be anything but a painter. Though he does paint, he certainly is known primarily as a sculptor.

GOODWIN: Was there a Scripps style?

SHEETS: I don't believe so. If there was a difference between the students that we turned out and maybe the prep students from other institutions, it was because we didn't really turn out a style. We emphasized the importance of them knowing how to express themselves, with also the feeling that if this was developed during their formative years, if they had something to say, they could say it. We didn't try to turn out little Picassos, we didn't try to turn out little Matisses. We didn't try to do any of these things. We familiarized them thoroughly with every facet of art, ancient and modern, abstract to representational. We certainly presented the case of all sides with a degree of integrity and excitement. I think the fact that we had a great variety of students--some working much more toward the abstract or semiabstract, others going more toward the representational--was a thing that I really liked about our department. It was not a single can job, where they came out in one direction. I think that aesthetically they were as well versed as any students at the time. Other schools were primarily bragging about the fact that they were giving kids such a high intensity of aesthetic understanding, but I think you understand what I mean. So many times out of our schools have come people

who have a certain limited taste, and they don't like anything else. They're not interested in anything else. Unless they have unusual capacity, it isn't easy for them to become really successful within that narrow area.

An artist needs to soak up and get the kind of language discipline that's only a prerequisite. It's not an end; it's a means. Because the talent is not in the hand, it's in the quality of mind. If they have that sense of insight and they have the tools with which to express it, they're going to be artists in their own right. If the level of the quality of mind is average or below, that's exactly where you're going to end up with in the artist. The thing that was thrilling to me was that a student who didn't ever really want to learn sculpture could get inside and, with a fine person teaching him, not just do academic realism but capture the real meaning of structure and the real meaning of design.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 4, 1976

SHEETS: George, one of the things I believe meant a great deal at Scripps was--and I take real pride in this because the college believed in what I was trying to accomplish in terms of preparing a different kind of an art student--I was able to bring strictly professional people in as teachers. I protected their time by putting all of their teaching into three days, never allowing any other interruption, half-day or anything else. It meant very often that I was interrupted in protecting them, but nevertheless, it was one of the best things that could have happened because it allowed each one of these people to do many outside projects as well as their own creative work, without interruption. I think that the nature of the work that they brought in and the kind of commissions they were receiving on the outside meant that our students had a slightly different look at art. They were seeing not only what was going on in the classroom and what the man or woman believed in as far as the necessity of background, but they saw the application outside. In many instances, they served as assistants. Many of them, after they graduated, went right into various studios and worked for two or three years as assistants to these professional people. In this sense, Scripps always had a touch and a

real feeling, a connection with the outside. I think our students have reflected that. As they went out into their own professional world, they didn't feel like they were going into a foreign world. It was a world they understood to a very high degree.

Then we always brought in, constantly, top people--for sometimes a week, sometimes a day--to sit down and discuss their work with the students. These were not necessarily academic people. They were people who had been through the mill but who we respected very much as creative people and as fine artists and as very exciting craftsmen. If you aren't willing to get the most exciting, even totally different, opinion from the outside to walk into your classroom, there's something wrong. We had a staff that I can't believe, as I look back on it, having been involved with other institutions, mainly on the boards of directors. There was so much mutual respect. Though we didn't all agree, and certainly we didn't work the same way, we really had some common objectives that we stuck to. There was never any unpleasantness. In all the years at Scripps, there was just none.

GOODWIN: I wanted to ask you about that, because you seem like a very positive thinker.

SHEETS: Well, I am, and I suppose that's true. But I will also say that I did not try to impose my particular kind of thinking on my staff. I was very careful in

selecting them to be sure that they understood what the ground rules were. The ground rules were very clear as I saw them. They had to be damn fine artists, they had to know what they were doing, and they really had to have the desire to teach everything that they could possibly teach the student from the bottom of their hearts. This was not a time-filling salary proposition. This was something that they had to have the desire to do, and I can say that we had that kind of teacher. When we had our monthly staff meetings, there was real camaraderie. Socially, we had such a wonderful time together. We all lived out in this small town, Claremont. Though we had plenty of connection with the big city, we had a complete life of our own, and it was great. Then bringing marvelous people from outside constantly was really an exciting relationship. We liked each other.

GOODWIN: Well, having been a graduate student for many years, I know that there can be many unpleasantries in an academic situation. Did you have problems, say, with tenure or jealousies among faculty?

SHEETS: Minute ones, minute ones, but I think that those minute problems that did develop were problems that in the light of the overall mutual respect disappeared. Now, tenure was never a serious problem in the art department. The people that were given permanent tenure were people who were so vital and so good for the college that they

weren't the kind that would fall back and sit on it. I think of Albert Stewart, for example, a man who, like myself, had never had any formal education. He was educated in England, where he was born. He had, I suppose, the usual English schoolboy background, although he didn't come from a family with a great deal of wealth. He certainly came from a family with some distinction. His father was an actor. His mother died when he was young. When he came to the United States, he was an amateur boxer and wrestler, and he was very much interested in art. He was probably eighteen when he arrived. Fortunately, he fell into the hands of the man we mentioned, the sculptor Paul Manship. He worked as an apprentice to Paul Manship for a great many years, I imagine five years. Then he became really an associate of Manship's. He executed some great, big, important commissions of his own, quite apart from Manship, but he also worked with Manship on some tremendous projects. He knew all of the good sculptors in New York, and he was a remarkable person in his own right. He came to Scripps, and it was a totally different experience. As a matter of fact, in settling a divorce and being remarried, he was very glad to leave New York and come to California on a very, very low salary scale. It was in the Depression. I brought Bert here in 1939, and I started to teach in '32, so he came very early.

Well, I think probably if I had to select one person

out of the entire staff that gave the most back to the college, it would be Albert Stewart. He was a brilliant lecturer, without any formal education or any formal experience in lecturing, but because he cared so much, felt so deeply about what he had to say, and with a certain English reserve. He had a quality, a presence, that was exciting and very moving. He was a marvelous sculpture teacher because he made students, right off the bat, carve stone, carve wood, as well as model, and draw, draw, draw. We were all so compatible because we were all saying the same thing to the student, in our own different ways. I kept pounding drawing; I kept pounding design; I kept pounding working with materials. So did Bert; so did [Jean] Ames; so did McFee and Phil Dike. Everyone had the same kind of emphasis, each in a different way. So the students couldn't escape the necessity of doing work outside of class to prepare themselves for class--not by merely reading, but by just hellish hard work. Well, Bert I think probably was the best art lecturer we ever had in humanities. He took on a major burden with delight, which would have been a shock to believe when I knew him in New York--to think that he would really become the kind of powerhouse that he became. He had a great sense of history. He had a great sense of the interrelation of things. He was an extraordinary human being. I think that it's the strength of a person like Bert and some of

the rest of us that kept us from having these small questions. Bert received tenure and eventually a very fine salary. In fact, when I was in India during the war, he was the acting head of the department. He was just a nice, wonderful, strong person. We didn't really have many of those problems.

GOODWIN: Who would you say was the most innovative teacher? That would be very difficult to say, but in terms of style, who was reaching the farthest? In terms of what has subsequently become popular and recognized?

SHEETS: I don't think that anyone reached out for that deliberately. I think it was a matter of choice. No one inhibited anyone's attempt in any direction he wanted to go. But we felt, and I still feel--if anything more strongly--that the reason we had successful students who went on and became individuals and created their own individual worlds and their own recognition was the fact that they were better prepared in the basic skills, which, I said, are only prerequisites. You don't get a gold medal for knowing how to paint. Now, if you add to that the importance of orientation in the world of art--call it aesthetic knowledge, call it respect for the meaning of art to life, call it anything you wish--if you can develop this in a student, along with some skills, and you keep them aware of the exciting, infinite potential of the styles that are yet to be created, created in spite of

the fact that we've had an incredible several thousand years of innovation, you don't really have to worry about being innovative. An artist can only be what he's capable of. It's impossible to hide inability. It's impossible to hide ability. You don't have to worry about your own style. Your own style is automatic because it's a result of who you are and what you think. You may try very hard to be like something else or to be innovative, a little different than you think you are, but it doesn't work. It never has worked, and it never will work. I've heard so much talk about individuality in the old days of teaching. I don't think you hear much about that anymore.

GOODWIN: Today it's called individual differences.

SHEETS: Yes, well, individual differences is what you and I and every other human being were born with, and there's not a thing we can do about it. I've tried to look better than I am all my life. It's impossible. Absolutely impossible. I've tried every route in the world to cover up my ignorance. I've tried every way in the world to be more something. You go out in the studio in the morning with the greatest zest in the world to really knock out something that is going to be just really there, and you end up by being you. I don't care how hard you try at it to be different, you are different. You can't be otherwise, because you're just you.

I'll always remember that one example of that critic

in Paris who reviewed an exhibition of twenty-five paintings done by twenty-five different artists of portraits of the same guy. Now, it would have been impossible for those guys to try to be different. They were different. I've always thought of it. It's probably something you've never seen, because I think I must have seen that catalog thirty-five years ago. It was terribly exciting to see what Matisse did, to see what Picasso did, to see what Braque did, just naming some of the headliners. Then you go on down into Derain and a lot of the others. It was a very exciting exhibition. Yet you knew, in every instance, that they were portraits of that man. Now it's not only seeing twenty-five different sides of a person, but it's accentuating twenty-five different qualities of that person to a degree that that became the style, whatever it was the artist accentuated. Maybe it was the color, maybe it was the basic lines of the structure, maybe it was the tonality. It's exciting to me that you don't need to strive for this. This just inevitably is.

GOODWIN: I'm not personally advocating a point of view here, but could you characterize the art work of the faculty by saying that it was traditional or conservative or representational?

SHEETS: I wouldn't say that it was conservative. I would say that it was representative, yes, more representative certainly than abstract, but I think that in every case--

the case of [Jean] Ames, Albert Stewart, Phil Dike, McFee, myself, on the painting, sculpture, and design side; then in the case of David Scott and Doug McClellan--we were all representational, but we were all tremendously concerned with the basic design, the basic abstract arrangement: colorwise, shapewise, movement, all the rest of it. It was a case of not saying, "To hell with representation; we only work in abstraction," but it was saying, "Any great representational art from the history of time had to be structurally sound from an abstract point of view." So to sum it up, we were representational, but we certainly were not traditional or eye-copying artists, and we certainly did not preach that. We did not teach people to model, to draw casts, and then make a head. We taught the structure behind everything. That's basically where abstract art comes from. It's the sense of what lies behind the surface. And we were that.

First of all, if you're talking about preparing artists, the fact is that art schools were a new idea, oh, maybe a 100 years or 125 years old. It's a whole new idea. Until that time, everybody was apprenticed. Nobody paid any attention about what was abstract, what was representational. A kid started in at nine or ten to, I suppose, clean brushes and scrub pots and that kind of thing, and grew up in a presence. They developed a state of mind, and they developed a sense of what was important by listening and by having

their knuckles rapped, I suppose. They had to do the menial things first. I don't think things have changed a bit. I mean, I don't think the necessity of change is here. I think the problem is that we've got a lot of people who make a great deal out of mental masturbation. I think they get too involved with the theories of art and the defense of their state of mind or their special attitude towards style. It just isn't necessary. I think artists should be taught just like a pianist has to be taught.

GOODWIN: Fundamentals.

SHEETS: The fundamental thing of the instrument. In music, it doesn't happen like it happens in art. Sure, they talk a lot about modern things--nuances and strange dissoanances. I understand all of that, and I love all of that. But right back to the point, you have to learn the instrument, and there's no damn way of getting around it. No way. In painting, I think it should be the same. I think it should be the same in architecture. I think it should be the same in every one of these different graphic or applied media. You have the necessity to learn how to become free, free to express you, your spirit, what you care about, what you know, how you feel.

Now, to conglomerate a kid's head with all this stuff that they throw at them from the time they get into junior high school about style--and yet I think style should be taught, but to say, "This is the way, and you mustn't learn

how to do anything objectively because you're going to be inhibited," I think it's just nonsensical, and it doesn't agree with the history of art. I've never seen an artist in the world who was inhibited by knowledge. I look at the drawings of the great masters, ancient or modern. I recognize that the artist knows, has a tremendous authority. Then I look at the work they do, and I see that where it is not maybe a representational painting, this drawing is extremely representational. The knowledge back of it is there, hidden in the most subtle, most fantastic way.

I just am against what I think is generally being done. I'm bitterly against it. I'm not partially against it, I'm bitterly against it--not as a reactionary, not as a conservative, not as somebody else. But if you know anything about the history of art, it doesn't work this way. The reason that we have a bunch of muddled kids coming out of schools today and not knowing which way to turn and not having enough opportunity is the fact they're not prepared to face life. They're not prepared to become a part of society. They're not prepared even technically to do a good solid job, whether it be of illustrative nature or doing murals or doing anything else. A doctorate degree doesn't mean anything and a master of fine arts degree doesn't mean anything if you just can't get up on a wall and work. This is my problem of finding people today. And we need more people than we can get today to help us

in the projects we're working on. I just go crazy trying to find people, because this whole generation hasn't been taught anything, basically. I'll stand on that in front of God and the works, including all the universities that are preaching this hogwash, as far as I'm concerned. And a great many teachers are doing this.

GOODWIN: How did you divide your time at Scripps between administrative duties and teaching?

SHEETS: I lived about three lives, because I not only had administration and teaching but I had my own life, which I refused to give up, as a painter and as a designer. All during the Scripps years, I was working on very large murals, I was working on buildings, I was working on industrial design, doing illustrations for magazines, and doing paintings for airlines. I must say I've been busy. Maybe I didn't amount to anything, but I've been busy as hell. You can't do that if you relax and say, "Well, I will teach and, even after that, administer." I wanted to do both, full time, which means that I literally haven't had what the normal person has had in the way of a normal weekend. I haven't had a normal life at all. It's been partially unfair to my family, but it's been the life that I chose. I stayed in education because I felt terribly excited about it, and I felt that artists that were on the firing line should be involved in education and not always leave it up to the guy that's just theorizing about it or who just

plays with it like a little animal over here. I think an artist should be capable of really conveying to others, to helping others learn the things that they know will make it easier for them to become personal, creative people. So I certainly didn't do it for a living. I didn't do it for any other reason than that I believed in it, although out of it came so many wonderful things to me in the way of associations and experiences that I never would have had otherwise, like the ones with the Association of American Colleges, where I lectured year after year. I was released by my college to go to areas selected by the Association of American Colleges for a period of anywhere from three to six or eight weeks. I went into the South, the Southeast, the Middle West, and the East on various occasions, lecturing to as many as five or six different colleges on each trip. Now, this was not an ordinary lecture tour. It was a case where I was invited by the Association of American Colleges to go to, for example, Tulane University. In fact, at Tulane I gave two lectures. One lecture was to half of the student body, and the second lecture was to the other half. Most particularly, I did try to convey what I felt was the place of art in life. I wasn't there to give them some little technical lecture on the history of some period but, really, my philosophy of how I believed the arts are important ingredients in everybody's life, and that if you learn to read these

languages, you gain the ability to enter worlds that are otherwise unenterable. And that was all interesting. But I met with the major professors, you might say the deans of the whole school, to discuss the place of art in the total university. I met with the art staff to discuss what they were doing, and then I met with students in conference. I was in each college for at least a week, and every day was just loaded with activity, meeting with people and working with them, formally and informally. It was a great experience for me, too, because I saw how differently things were run in different areas and how some colleges seemed to be really moving into marvelous areas of understanding and others seemed to be thwarted by the very thing we're talking about here: stylistic approaches without any realization of even the excitement or meaning of art. I've known lots of people who know a great deal about art but don't really like it. I don't think this leads to anything important in art. It's got to be consuming from the point that I don't think you can become expressive if you're an artist if you don't have freedom to express yourself--not just a freedom of style, but a knowledge of how to absolutely state whatever it is that you have in your mind.

GOODWIN: You were affiliated with the Association of American Colleges for about ten years, 1938 to '48?

SHEETS: Let's see, yes, except for the interval of years

that I was gone to the war. That's true. It was about ten years.

GOODWIN: Who were some other people who served a similar function, if there were others?

SHEETS: I'm sure there were others. I don't know. I didn't know many people out here that were doing that. I'm sure there were from the big universities, but I wasn't aware enough of the staff to be able to say. I used to meet occasionally people from eastern colleges and universities. It was a big, major plan, and I'm sure there were many. From Scripps, there were two of us who did this fairly regularly. The other person was the poet that I grew up with, the humorous poet at Scripps, Dick [Richard] Armour. Dick Armour and I went to kindergarten together. When we finished high school, he went East. He went in the navy. I did other things. He taught in the East somewhere near Washington, then came back to Scripps, which was a great reunion for us. Dick did a great deal of this.

GOODWIN: So it wasn't only in the arts?

SHEETS: No, Dick did it in literature.

GOODWIN: It sounds today like the traveling Phi Beta Kappa lecturers, who have a base at one university but visit several others as guests.

SHEETS: It's a good idea. I found it tremendously stimulating to me. I was told that I was stimulating

to them, but I can't speak for that, except that they seemed to keep wanting me to do it. I remember that I used to receive wonderful letters from the Association of American Colleges about how they felt about my trips. But quite apart from all that side of it, I gained so much in the way of excitement, because I had to put into words so many feelings that I wouldn't have done if I had just stayed back there in the normal slot. In putting it into words, it becomes something that you really in a way commit yourself to, and I found it just tremendously stimulating. Of course I met some of the most marvelous people.

I met Grant Wood when I went back to Iowa on one of those trips, and it was a marvelous experience. I received a letter from Grant Wood about a month before I went to Iowa. They had a booming department then. They had a marvelous graphics department, and Grant was teaching painting. They had, oh, they had about thirty-five people on the staff. It was a marvelous department. They did do a lot of teacher preparation, too, but it was very alive. Wasn't it [Mauricio] Lasansky, the guy there who was a great etcher and graphic man? Of course he's made a profound impact upon the whole graphic medium in the United States, and there were two or three other people. I received a letter from Grant Wood, whose work I had known, but I had never met him. It was the most delightful letter. I never read a more interesting letter. He said that he was

writing because he knew that I was coming to the university, and he wanted me. If, after reading his letter, I could stand living in his house, he wanted me to stay with him. Then he described the most intimate details of the house, the people in it--and there were about six or seven people, including the housekeeper--and the dogs and the cats, the whole works, and it was just so charming. Well, of course I wrote back that I would be charmed, first to meet him and secondly to have the privilege of being in his home. I was met at the airport thirty miles away--you can't land where the university is--by his man secretary, who told me that Grant was in the hospital and had had a terrible cancer operation when he wrote the letter and wasn't going to be at home. But he hadn't wanted to say that because he thought I might think it was an inconvenience and wouldn't stay, but that we would be seeing him in the hospital. Well, it was really one of the most charming experiences. The house was unbelievably beautiful. It had the most marvelous early American furniture. It was an exquisite house. He gave me his room, as a matter of fact, and then I saw him many, many times at the hospital while I was there. Then later we became much closer friends, and he visited us in California and lectured out at the colleges and so forth. Those are just personal things, but there were so many things like that that happened. I made personal friendships that have lasted the rest of my life,

from many people that I met on these tours.

GOODWIN: Were there some other colleges that you remember as being particularly active and enthusiastic?

SHEETS: Oh, goodness, the University of Oklahoma surprised the devil out of me. I was just amazed at how much was going on there. It was very exciting. Southern Methodist in Texas, and Texas A&M. Of course, I went to colleges in the Middle West. I went to the University of Minnesota, University of Illinois (I should get those together for you and tell you exactly, because off of the top of my head I wouldn't look very smart), University of Arizona, University of New Mexico. I went to several Negro universities, and I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed those experiences. I went to, I think, three, and I lived in each case in the university for the full week or ten days and met with students and staff, had my meals with them, and was so excited about so many things about those universities that were quite different.

There was one in particular, Xavier, in New Orleans, which was a Catholic black college. They did not have dormitory facilities, and they put me up in a hotel downtown. Well, the first man I met was a father, Father Murphy, who was a professor of philosophy. He also was an assistant to the bishop, the number-one assistant to the bishop of New Orleans. He was also president of the New Orleans Drama Society and Theater, and he had a small

Negro parish where he used to go out into the bayous every Sunday to give mass. Well, my wife was traveling with me on that trip, and we had more fun with Father Murphy. He said that he wanted us to really see New Orleans, and he really did let us see New Orleans, in addition to all the exciting things that happened in the school. We saw the theater from the inside, we went to the greatest places to eat every night, and we talked till all hours. The man had a kind of a universal mind, which was always very exciting when you run into such people. But I went to his Shakespeare classes, and I never had more excitement than to hear these kids read Shakespeare, with these great eyes and the excitement and the fire that they had. He was a great teacher, of course, but the students themselves gave so much back. I enjoyed the art classes. I was a little bit concerned in their art that they didn't have the quality of teaching they should have had, and they were a little inclined towards edging them over towards making posters and things like that. I felt that if they had better teachers, the art department would have perhaps been stronger. But I thought that the students themselves just naturally, instinctively, had a great deal of talent that I thoroughly enjoyed.

I went to another Negro university outside of New Orleans. I think it was a southern Methodist university [Southern University], with a religious background. There I met some of the most exciting people I've ever met,

including one woman in particular. About a third of the staff was white, about two-thirds was black, and this young woman was one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen in my life. She had bright red hair, a beautiful red-headed girl, and she was one of the finest pianists I've ever listened to. She was doing concerts all over the South, as well as teaching music there, and I took it for granted that she was white. I think it was the last night that we were there I was talking with her at dinner about the fact that I thought it was so wonderful that she was giving her time to this kind of a university. She looked at me rather puzzled and said, "Well, do you think I'm white?" And I said, "I presumed you were." She said, "Well, I'm not. My father is president of Tuskegee [Institute]. As a matter of fact, he's very dark." But she said, "My mother was French, and I've inherited all my mother's facial characteristics and color." She said, "I'm half-Negro." She was a charming person, but the whole experience there was wonderful. It was great. I met with the athletic department. I met with every department. Who was the guy that won the big things in the '32 Olympics here?

GOODWIN: Jesse Owens?

SHEETS: Yeah, he was the coach. These were experiences I'll just never forget. In fact, I'll not name the college, but I went directly to Texas after I left this particular university. I was at a dinner party--not at the president's

house, but there were several staff members present. I waxed enthusiastic about the last college. They asked me where I had been, and I started to tell them the different colleges that I traveled to, and I said, "The last one was probably one of the most exciting." Maybe I shouldn't put this on this tape. One of the people said, "Well, where is it?" I told him. They bristled. The entire table bristled. Of course this was a long time ago. We're talking about a totally different climate than today. When I really laid it on the line that it was a Negro college, one gentleman--or not gentleman--one man said, "Well, I think you're a traitor to your race." I said, "I'm sure you don't mean that." He said, "Well, I do mean it, and I don't think you have any business to give your talent and ability and so forth to such a situation." My wife and I left the dinner table. But that was the only unpleasant thing that ever happened on any of those trips. That wouldn't happen, there's no way it could happen today, but it was typical of the climate in those days.

GOODWIN: Why did you finally end your affiliation with the Association of American Colleges?

SHEETS: I just became too busy. They continued to ask me, but I reached a point where I had so much work that I couldn't go. It wasn't just a matter of leaving the college. I was leaving big murals and all sorts of other things, plus preparing exhibitions, because I did keep my

painting going. Although it was difficult, very difficult at times, I never let it get away from me. I would take trips as often or as long as I could. It was really living a triple life.

GOODWIN: There was one other item about Scripps I wanted to discuss, so we'll backtrack a moment. That is the various art works, murals and so on, that were commissioned for the college and what role you might have played. I'm thinking of the Alfred Ramos Martinez mural in particular.

SHEETS: Yes. Well, Martinez was a man that I loved so deeply. As you know, he came to this country because of his daughter, who needed a series of something like sixteen operations. He left his beloved country. He had a passion about Mexico that few people have about their own country, but he had to live here his whole life because of this daughter who was born quite late in his life. He had done a few murals here and there, a beautiful one in Ventura and one down in La Jolla, but there were only two or three. I always thought that it would be marvelous to have him do a garden at Scripps. Finally we worked it out, and I got the money to have him do it. Tragically, he died in the middle of that job from pneumonia, which was a result of the cold he caught during the painting. So I've always had a very double feeling about the thing. One is a great appreciation of the fact that we had him do it, and I'm happy to say that they are preserving it now, for the first time properly.

Only part of it is in finished fresco. Part of it is tempera underpainting as the guideline, and part of it was just a few lines drawn on the concrete wall. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] He was such a wonderful little man. He had so much vitality, and of course, he worked completely from the heart. He had made, I'm sure, hundreds and hundreds of drawings in Mexico in his early days, and he had good training in France. But he would simply stand back with a long bamboo pole with a piece of charcoal stuck on the end of it. He had very feeble hands at that time of his life, but he would hold the two hands together and he would draw these beautiful images. He hardly ever changed the line, standing back about ten feet. It was a marvel to watch him, which goes back to what we were saying, this thing of, "If you see it, if you understand it, then you can state it," and he did it. But it's a beautiful garden, and it's a lovely mural.

GOODWIN: Where did the funds come from?

SHEETS: The [Fine Arts] Foundation agreed to raise the money, and it was raised very quickly. We all gave money to it, and it was no problem at all.

GOODWIN: Of course, the Orozco mural was painted before.

SHEETS: The Orozco mural was painted two years before I went to Scripps. It was painted at Pomona [College]. It's an incredible painting. Have you ever seen it?

GOODWIN: Yeah, through the door. I've never stood in front of it.

SHEETS: Through a crack in the door. Oh, what a shame. Well, you'd be interested in the story, and I think it's safe to tell it now. There was a professor by the name of Pijuan [Jose Pijuan y Soteras]. He was an art historian, who had written many books, and he was teaching art history at Pomona at the time. When he saw this huge dining room being built, he said, "I know the man who should decorate it." Without discussing it with anyone, he went to Mexico and promised Orozco that he could do this whole enormous room and that he would raise the money for it. He came back and told the college that he wanted him to paint underneath that arch in the dining room. He said that he would raise the money for it. Well, Orozco got up here in good faith and painted it, and there never had been any money raised. Pijuan had hever really gone out to do it properly. He just had such a desire to have it done that it didn't become realistic to him--I mean the actual procedure. So he prevailed upon the contractor who put up all the plaster and all that end of it to give that, and then he did talk a certain number of people out of enough money to pay just a small pittance of what he agreed to pay Orozco, but assured him that that was all right because it would all come when he did the rest of the building and so forth. Well, there was so much controversy about the mural that the college president at that time said, "Well, we're just not going to do any more." It was really a

ridiculous thing. In fact, I hate to even admit this, but when I was at Scripps, after I had been there for about two years, there was a strong, strong movement to paint that mural out.

GOODWIN: Was it because of his political views?

SHEETS: No, not really. I don't think you could accuse this of having any political meaning of Prometheus as a symbol. It's not very political. Although Orozco was doing huge things in Mexico, he never had been an avid communist like some of the others, but he had strong social feelings. I think it was because people just didn't understand it. It was so powerful, and it was so unlike what people were accustomed to.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 4, 1976 and DECEMBER 10, 1976

GOODWIN: We were discussing the Orozco mural at Pomona College.

SHEETS: Yes. It's such a beautiful mural, and it has attracted so much attention, but in the early days it was something of a shock to people who had little or no background in the art of mural painting or even art. I remember one evening it was my pleasure to introduce Walt Disney to a very distinguished group of people who were gathered in the dining room. It was in connection with an award that he was given, and the room was filled with some of the most interesting people in Southern California. Up on the platform were several distinguished people and what not to make the award. I was sitting next to the president of the college. At dinner he turned--and he had to turn completely around to look at the mural--and he said, "I don't know when we're going to get that thing out of here." He was a great friend of mine, but he certainly had a blind spot in the field of art. I said, "Mr. President, I'm sorry to have to say this to you but," I said, "long after you and four college presidents are gone and forgotten, people will be coming here to look at this Prometheus by Orozco." I said, "They'll come from all over the world, because it's one of the world's finest paintings of this period. I

think you should be very grateful, and I hope that you really will not think seriously ever of any of these movements that have taken place to remove this mural." I think it came at the right time, and I think it did some good, because I never heard anything more about that possibility. But there had been threats up to that time of actually painting out that mural.

GOODWIN: Is there any way to measure the impact that the mural might have had on art students?

SHEETS: It had a great impact on art students, and I presume it's had an impact upon the other students. It's in the men's dining room, and some of the original complaints I heard were, "Well, you can't face that bloody thing every day." Well, of course the students didn't face it every day. The tables were set at such an angle that when the students sat down and faced each other across the table, they were looking sideways, not toward the mural. I know that that was greatly scoffed at by the students themselves, who said this is no bloody thing we face every day--it's a dramatic thing. I think by the time the student had been through four years of Pomona College, they had a very different feeling about that mural than they did when they went in. I'm sure that it meant something to them. Maybe they didn't understand it, maybe they couldn't comprehend--even didn't give a damn about--the meaning of the theme, but I'm sure that they came away

with the sense of an experience. I don't think there's any question. And that certainly prompted the people to sponsor the beautiful thing that [Rico] Lebrun did. Have you seen that?

GOODWIN: Oh, yes.

SHEETS: Lebrun did a decoration which was a tremendously exciting thing. Again, it's not the kind of thing that the public quickly grasps and understands and perhaps doesn't even like in some instances, but it's a great thing to have those two murals there in that male dormitory. I think the colleges are exceedingly proud today that they're there.

GOODWIN: Were you in any way involved with getting the Lebrun mural?

SHEETS: No, I had nothing to do with it. I was so thrilled when I heard that he was coming. In fact, he called me one day and said that "I'm going to do a mural up there." And I was just terribly excited. Unfortunately, he did it at a time that I was away on a sabbatical. It's a beautiful painting. I love it.

GOODWIN: What is your own orientation toward Mexican painting of the twentieth century?

SHEETS: Well, I've always been more than excited, just tremendously moved by it. I knew most of the painters. I knew Rivera, I knew him slightly, and I knew Orozco slightly. I've met [Rufino] Tamayo on a few occasions,

and I've known a great many of the sculptors. I think of the incredible beauty of some of those early frescoes in Mexico. I think particularly of Rivera's paintings in the National [Ministry] of Education, which too few people know about and too few people ever see when they go to Mexico. They look at the late things that he did in the great palace [Mexican Government Building]. They are obviously very descriptive and exceedingly well painted, but they haven't anything like the spirit and art that the earlier things mean to me. They just aren't to be compared with the earlier things. Now, the Palace of Education has a series of--if I'm correct, I think there are four major courtyards. You go through a main entrance to an area where tourists would never go. In fact, I had a hard time getting a cab to take me the last time I went there to show my son these murals. You go into a series of four enormous courtyards, and around all four walls of each courtyard are paintings that are approximately twenty-two to twenty-three feet high. The figures are very large--most of them are ten, twelve, fourteen feet high--in color that you would hardly believe a man could get out of fresco painting: brilliant, exciting, wonderful color, robust and strong and very powerful. Some of them are exceedingly strong in their almost brutal commentary against in some instances the church, in some instances the politicians, the government. Here's another situation where these are incredibly

valuable yet they've been water-stained; they've not been protected as they should have been. They're going to be there, and they're magnificent even in the state that they're in, but every time I see them I feel terrible that someone in Mexico doesn't strongly move to see that these things are better preserved. They're magnificent. I think the ones that he did in the Cortez Palace in Cuernavaca are a little quieter, a little more subtle, but they're quite beautiful. They are of that same early style. Later on, he became much more literal and less imaginative, I think, or became so concerned with history itself that it sort of outrode his sense of the design of it. I think Mexico has had a great importance in art of the twentieth century, a great importance because it came from inside. It was not a cloak that they put on. I like so many of their graphics, and they have sculptors who are really superior sculptors in the sense that they're not just involved in little aesthetic, ticklish things. They're doing things that they really care about.

GOODWIN: Are there parallels between your work and the Mexican muralists, for example?

SHEETS: I wouldn't say so. I think that if I had a cause that was as strong as they had in the revolution, I think it might have improved my work. I think that the absolute dedication that they must have had in a very critical part of the war was not unlike the ancient days of Greece, when

the artists were involved with the actual fights in the wars themselves. These people were very involved. I persuaded Siqueiros on his first trip to California to teach a fresco class.

GOODWIN: Where?

SHEETS: In Los Angeles at Chouinard. Then he did the thing, down at the old Mexican plaza [Olvera Street], which was painted out. He did a very beautiful painting at Chouinard, which unfortunately just deteriorated because he tried for the first time the air brush. The air brush gave a marvelous quality--it was a stunning mural--but it didn't work in fresco painting. It did not penetrate; it was too wet. Whereas in real fresco, when you pull a brush across a dry plaster--not dry in the sense that it's dried out, but not a wet plaster--there's an actual sucking sound that you can hear as paint goes right into the plaster. It penetrates to a degree. But when he shot this on with an air brush, he got some very exciting effects, very strong. They were very characteristic of the kind of form he liked, because he used an air brush on a lot of his easel paintings. It didn't last. The water and time and rain and sun just slowly ate it away, and it finally just disintegrated so much that they took it off--not because it was anti-anything, it was just because it deteriorated. None of us knew what he was going to do. It was like the one he painted

down in the plaza. He had all of his side people coming in toward the center, and it wasn't until he got to the very end that he had this anti-American central theme. He was a little bit the same way with the workmen in the mural at Chouinard. He had all the workmen that just looked like guys working on scaffolds and doing a good job, until we finally all discovered that they were listening to this rabble-rouser. It was characteristic, but he was a very powerful man.

GOODWIN: I'm wondering whether Mexican art or art of Central and South America has had a very pervasive impact on California art, considering the proximity of California.

SHEETS: I'm afraid not, to the degree that perhaps it would have been better. I'm sure that an artist like Ben Shahn was profoundly affected by Mexican art. I'm sure of that, not ever having heard him say so. But I think that Ben Shahn was a tremendously creative artist in his own right. I think the work of the Mexican artists probably were a greater influence than any other single group of artists might of been, if he had an influence. His dedication to social problems and to mankind were profound. We [Scott Foundation] just bought a fantastic Ben Shahn for this collection. I think it's one of the most beautiful Ben Shahns I've ever seen. It's a painting of three men, a large painting about forty inches high. For him, it's a large painting. It's called Anger. Instead

of it being three guys just clenching fists at each other, just in the subtle series of lines in their faces and one hand you get a very powerful impression, which is so like so many of the early Tamayos and so much like some of the early drawings of Rivera and Orozco, that I think there is a relationship. But I think California, unfortunately, hasn't felt that.

GOODWIN: In a way California--or Southern California in particular--seems somewhat impervious to that kind of foreign influence. It would seem that it might be more natural that it occurred, and in fact it doesn't appear to have occurred.

SHEETS: No, I don't think it has occurred, I really don't. Southern California is a strange place, because when I grew up here there were so few artists, relatively speaking, and then suddenly--by suddenly, I guess I should restrict that and say mainly after the war--we have simply had the world flow in on top. There haven't been too many artists here that have much of a California root system. They've brought a lot of very exciting ability and talent and feeling from other places, but I wouldn't say that there's been much indigenous sense of things here at all. When I grew up, there was a California eucalyptus school, which had a very pleasant kind of competence, but it had nothing to do with the social order or with humanity particularly. It had lovely pink lights on the hills in the

afternoon, and eucalyptus trees were very fluffy and willowy and beautiful. A few people painted the sea, and they did just little California landscapes. I grew up in that atmosphere, and it really wasn't until much later that people like Lebrun and others came in and had a force that added something quite different to what was here. Of course, now it's as universal as can be. It could be Paris or New York or anyplace else. There's not much of a special indigenous quality.

GOODWIN: There's nothing typically Californian today.

SHEETS: I don't think so now. I don't think there are many artists who are even painting the country particularly. Maybe I'm one of the few that sticks with it, because I still love it. It's my place where I grew up. I hope I'm not doing just pink, fluffy eucalyptus trees, but I'm doing the things that I like. Of course, I love Mexico so passionately that I go down there a great deal to paint, and Mexican painting isn't the kind that you travel with. It's what you do where you are.

GOODWIN: Were there any other large commissions by outside artists at the Claremont Colleges that we've neglected?

SHEETS: Not by outside artists, no. In fact, I think the only other mural at Claremont is the one that I did on the theater. I designed the theater, and I gave a huge mosaic, three episodes of Shakespeare.

GOODWIN: Oh, yes, the Garrison Theatre.

SHEETS: The Garrison Theatre, I designed the theater, and I gave that. I think that's the only other mural there in Claremont, actually.

GOODWIN: You built a home in Claremont?

SHEETS: I built two homes in Claremont.

GOODWIN: Well, we've mentioned your first home.

SHEETS: The second one was up at Padua Hills, which is three miles north of the town and the colleges. It was a beautiful area up there in the toe of the foothills, and I built our home there. First I built a stable, and then I built a house, then I built a studio. That was a great experience. I built a rammed-earth house. When I was designing air schools for the air force, we were running out of materials everywhere in the early part of the war. I had done a lot of reading about rammed earth, so I tried to persuade the army engineers to let me build some rammed-earth houses. I had concepts of prefabricated forms which could be put up if the soil was right and had the right amount of clay and sand and so forth. We could eliminate wood and mortar and everything else and build these rammed-earth houses or buildings. Well, they were very, very reticent about it, so I decided to build one to prove it could be done. I built a very large house, as a matter of fact, with walls eighteen feet high, and thick, beautiful, big walls, and very gutsy fenestration. After I had it all

up, the [Los Angeles] County and building department was so concerned for fear it might fall down in an earthquake--which I'm sure it wouldn't have--they practically said I had to take it down. Well, I assured them that that was out of the question, and I solved the problem very simply by putting reinforcing steel on the outside, inside and out, and Guniting the wall with an inch and a half of Gunite, which would have meant that if it didn't have any dirt in it it would have been a fortress. They were very happy. As a matter of fact, at the time, it didn't cost much more than plastering. But it was an experience because it shows the bureaucratic mind, how hard it is for them to adjust to any new ideas. We later proved that from the point of view of an earthquake, it had tremendous strength. It had the ability to roll more easily than a mortar building, and it was designed with enough solidity that it would take care of the seismic thrust, I'm sure, without any question. But anyway, it made a beautiful house. It was half-indoors and half-outdoors and had nice gardens. It was a great wrench when we left that area, because we loved it very much. It had a nice stable, a training track, because I raised show horses at that time and used to train them there and take them to the shows. Then later I converted that stable--which was also a mural studio, a combination of stable and mural studio--I converted it into a house for some friends of ours. It's a

beautiful house up there today. [tape recorder turned off]

DECEMBER 10, 1976

GOODWIN: Last session we discussed the Scripps College years, and we concluded with some remarks about Mexican mural painting. We finally ended with mention of the second home that Mr. Sheets built in the Claremont area. This session we're going to discuss the World War II years, and we're going to begin with the building of schools for the air force.

SHEETS: Fine, George. I think it was the latter part of 1939, a friend of mine, whom I had met socially--Major [Corliss C.] Moseley, a man eminently known here in aviation circles--ran most of the repair work and teaching of flying and whatnot, plus many other interests in aviation, at the old Glendale Airport. He called me and asked me if I knew an honorable contractor in the city of Claremont or that area. He said he had the responsibility of having an air school built almost overnight, that he had been given a contract by the U.S. Army Air Force to hire instructors and ground-school teachers and build a complete school, hangars and ground school, for 900 people. He said it had to be done in a matter of three months, and he asked if I knew an honest contractor. I said, "I certainly do. By good fortune I can tell you not only a very competent

man, but a man of great integrity who is associated with the colleges. He's a trustee of the colleges, and he's a neighbor of mine, and I've worked with him over a period of years." He said, "Well, could you make a date with him for this afternoon? I need to come out. We have to build this school immediately." I made the date and they met. After the meeting, the contractor, whose name was Clarence Stover, called me and said, "Millard, I appreciate so much meeting Major Moseley, and I love his enthusiasm, but all he had on the back of an envelope was an idea of how many buildings the school ought to have. There were no plans, no drawings, no conception of the scale, or anything. I had to tell him that I'd love to build it, but I couldn't build it from the back of that envelope." In those days even the construction of that first school was well over a million dollars, which would be like, probably, ten or twelve million today, to give you some idea of the scope of the project. Major Moseley called me that night later and said that he was distressed with the fact that nobody could build this thing from his envelope, and he said, "You've got to help me. Will you put this thing together for me?"

So without wanting to be involved, I suddenly found myself involved in designing a major air school. Though I'd been designing buildings for a long time and I had done many fairly large projects, I hadn't had a project

before where you had to have guys flying in thirty days from a dead, still start. Normally you'd spend three to four to five months on the plans and then build it in six or eight months. So I just literally, practically slept with Major Moseley for about a week and did get all of the information, during which time I was having the site surveyed and the elevations worked out and so forth. I literally designed that school while it was being built. I laid out a master plan from the layout of the buildings and quickly ascertained the size and that kind of thing and gradually put it together. We were really designing the last of the classroom buildings and the dining rooms and the kitchens and that sort of thing last while they were building the dormitories and the hangars and the control towers, and getting the whole plot covered with pavement so they could land airplanes on it. Well, it was a very peculiar happenstance because this field was the first field out of some seventeen schools finally that were given to private contractors to build in order that the program could be speeded up. Up to that time, they had produced approximately sixty pilots a year for the air force.

GOODWIN: That's all?

SHEETS: That's all. They of course were mostly men who had finished West Point and had come through the regular system of the army and then gone to the air force. Their

estimated aim was 90,000 pilots, including flying engineers--that is, navigators--not to count gunners, mechanics, and all the rest of the people who could be involved. Bombardiers came later. The army air force knew that it was impossible to put this load on the U.S. Army Engineers, which of course had been the organization which had always built schools, partly because it would take at least a year for them to go through the routine of planning. In addition to that, they were planning every other facet of development for what appeared to be an inevitable war. Also, if they used everybody in the entire air force, they couldn't have even had enough instructors, let alone people to administer and run the operation. So for two reasons they went to private contractors, who, on the strength of their contract with the U.S. Army Air Force, could finance and build the schools, buy the land or lease it, and hire the personnel. Then, once the schools were completed, the government bought the schools and owned and operated them. The private contractors did handle all of the flying on an hourly basis, and in those days they made a great deal of money out of the project because the taxes weren't the same as they are now. Well, that's just for background.

Now the big problem was that there were so many contractors being interviewed and they were searching so desperately for air space. Air space is a peculiar

thing when you recognize that they wanted all schools beneath 2,500 feet of altitude. When you think that each school needed a radius of a minimum of twenty-five to fifty miles of air space, you couldn't put them right next to each other for teaching beginning flyers. Weather had to be reasonable. In the beginning, they wanted areas that were connected to towns where they could get utilities, water and power and roads. So this school happened to be the first one that met the deadline. We literally were flying in ninety-four days from the time that they asked me to design this school. The contractor was superb. He really did a job that's hard to believe. As I designed more and more of the schools, I tried to make the buildings as interesting as I could on a low budget. I created decorative qualities, which I believed in, as part of the function, instead of the typical army barracks, so lacking in personality.

GOODWIN: What did you include?

SHEETS: Well, I painted murals in the dining rooms. It was just fun--I gave those. Toward the end of each job, I would be so excited about them that I wanted to add my own feeling to the place. So I'd go in and paint murals in the dining rooms and try to fit them into the locale where they were. I even designed furniture, because we couldn't buy furniture fast enough. The furniture market didn't provide the heavy stock that we needed to stand the

pressure of all these young men. They were pretty rugged young guys. So I designed chairs and beds and chests of drawers and tables for the dining rooms. So I had them out here in Los Angeles. It became an overnight business, which I had nothing to do with. I had these people contract directly with the various contractors for the schools. But it was a very exciting experience to put it all together--landscaping, the whole works.

By coincidence, the man who was the head of the air force, Hap [Henry H.] Arnold, was a great friend of Major Moseley. To celebrate the fact that this was the first school finished, he flew out from Washington to celebrate the opening. He fell in love with the school, went back to Washington, and told his staff that the one fellow who knew how to design air schools was that guy out in California, [laughter] which really was a ridiculous thing because I had to put a staff together overnight. I had engineers working, along with draftsmen, while I was flying back and forth to Washington for discussions. I designed practically every school that I did, not on the back of envelopes but in proper pads, flying back and forth. It used to take twenty-three hours to Washington by a DC-3, with something like eleven stops each way.

GOODWIN: What was the full name of the first school?

SHEETS: The first school was called Cal-Aero, and it was quite famous because it was the first. About the time

that I thought we were all cleaned up, these contractors began to arrive from all over the United States saying, "Here, we've got a site in Arizona and Texas and Ohio." It ended up that in a period of about three years, I did seventeen major schools. I had a lot of interesting experience, you know, working with totally different kinds of contractors. By contractors, I'm not speaking of the building contractors, because Stover built, I think, something like fourteen out of my seventeen schools. He was so proficient, and he moved so readily from one big area to another. He had built up a staff that was really competent to do these things. But it was a great experience for me to meet these kinds of business people, industrial people. I met everybody from big industrial people who were given a contract to motion picture people, like Leland Hayward and a whole group of Hollywood stars who built Thunderbird I and Thunderbird II [flying schools]. They were all flyers, incidentally. That's why they became interested in this thing. That touched me for the rest of my life, because I moved into different areas, through those connections, that I never would have moved into before or probably ever. There was the excitement of moving more and more out into space, where there were no utilities, where there was nothing even within twenty-five to fifty miles in the way of a town, where we had to drill our own wells and build generators and the whole

thing. It was a wild experience, but very, very exciting.

It was during this time that I met so many of the men who later I was to meet firsthand in the war, not only some of the top young captains and majors who were running the schools, who then went on into combat, but many of the students who went through these schools and who I later flew with on bombing missions and got to know, who rose very rapidly in the ranks. When you have an enormous extension of a program like the army air force did, some of those early lieutenants became brigadier generals before the end of the war.

GOODWIN: Were you anticipating that when the war started you would be in the military?

SHEETS: No. I was married, and I had four children by the end of the air school program. It didn't occur to me that I would necessarily be in the fighting end of it, but I was very sure that I would be involved somewhere where I might be some help or at least feel that I was contributing something to the war effort. Because I don't think you can get as involved as I was with the onrush of the thing, the tremendous surge of getting that job done, and then just sit back quietly and teach in the college. It just somehow didn't work.

But the one thing that was most exciting about it to me was that Americans had the capacity to do this. This was an extraordinary thing, because before I left the

projects, there were 90,000 boys a year being trained. They hit the mark they set, and though some of those schools went on for like two and a half years after we finished them, they really were successful and exciting projects. The know-how just seemed to come up out of the ground. You wondered where they could get that many flight instructors, where they could get that many ground instructors. Of course, the colleges did turn out and had the people within the college area who could do these complicated things that were involved on the ground school. That was the high level that was demanded of these people. Of course, everything in the fields of mathematics--oh, I can't even begin to go into how complicated it was. But it was a good background for me, and I learned to fly--not with any license, but I did a lot of flying. Among other things, I had to barnstorm all around looking for areas after a while, and I had learned to know every demand that was needed in terms of the peculiar necessities and had to be able to analyze whether we could do some of the things that had to be done.

GOODWIN: Were there some other schools built in California?

SHEETS: Yes, I built one in Tulare, one in Visalia, one in King City, one in Dos Palos, one in Oxnard. There were one or two more. Just off the top of my head I can't remember, but there were that many in California, and we had three or four in Arizona, the Thunderbird schools and

the Falcon school, which was where we trained British pilots. We trained about 50,000 British pilots at Falcon Field over a period of about three years. It was designed for the British--not that it was any different, but they sent the boys over here. We did train about that many fliers and engineers. Then there were several in Texas: Corsicana and Fort Stockton and Uvalde. I can't remember all the places in Texas. There was one in Ohio. It came to a total of seventeen.

GOODWIN: Did you employ any artists to help you with artistic details?

SHEETS: Yes, after we were really moving, I did employ quite a few artists who were colleagues of mine to do various decorations. We tried to get good reproductions of good paintings, in addition to doing some things right on the wall, to make the place habitable. In fact, it became kind of a joke. The army air force referred to our schools as the country clubs of the air.

As a matter of fact, there was an investigation after the war, quite a long time after the war, as to why I had done so many schools, and why this contractor had done so many schools. I guess it was the period when they were trying to prove collusion or something. I remember how angry I was. The FBI arrived in Claremont and tied up my bank account and went all over town trying to find out if I had any reputation or not, because they couldn't figure

out why anyone had done so many. Well, it turned out that they couldn't find anything wrong, and I was pretty upset when they finally came to tell me in my office at the college that they hadn't found anything wrong and that they were leaving. I said, "In other words, this investigation is closed." And this insolent son of a bitch turned to me and he said, "The FBI never closes a case." Well, I said, "I've got news for you. Unless you have some kind of a warrant, don't you ever come into my office again, because whether you're the FBI or God almighty, I'll just knock the bejesus out of you." I was so angry. They had been in that town, and they had gone through it with a fine-tooth comb. They had combed the air force in and out. The funniest part of it was, and what really dissipated the examination was, that our schools cost about 40 percent per man housed and fed and taught to fly what the regular army air force schools cost, and they were living in rudimentary huts. But we did it because we just jumped in. In fact, it shocked the hell out of them when they found out that the years that I designed those schools I made roughly 70 percent of my income from what I normally make, because I gave up everything to do this, and I was doing it on an extremely limited budget. I did have an expense account, which meant flying and that kind of thing, but there was no expense account for luxuries. There weren't any luxuries to begin with. But anyway, it dissipated, and that was that.

It was really interesting to meet after that, in all parts of the world, even twenty years after the war, men who had been young officers, very young, or even cadets, in high places in Turkey and other countries. It's just really been an astounding, fun thing to see what happens with those people.

Well, then almost at the exact ending of that whole project, the war, of course, was well under way. Pearl Harbor had been, I think, a year before we finished the final building. One last point on that: I felt that toward the end of our project that we should try rammed-earth because we had completely run out of wood--there was very little in the way of material; everything was so short that you couldn't believe it. Skilled labor was practically nonexistent at this point. They'd gone into various army projects, and many of them had gone overseas--carpenters and whatnot had gone overseas--to do that kind of work. I had done a great deal of research on rammed-earth houses all over the world, some of them being 1,000 years old and that kind of thing, as well as the huts that were built in the Dakotas in the plains in our own country in the early days. I figured out that if we could get equipment set up, we could build these dormitories and major buildings with rammed earth. It's an old, old process. It isn't like adobe. We didn't have time to make adobe. But with rammed earth, if you have the right

soil conditions, you can, by putting about the maximum of 4 percent moisture content, put it into forms in layers of four to six inches as it's dumped in, and then by compressing it with a tamping machine, you can make it as hard as concrete. You can't drive a nail into it. I figured this would be the greatest solution. We could build prefabricated forms that could be moved along. We could compact the dirt up into windows after it had been saturated with the right amount of water and let it settle under canvas for a few days. The engineers in Washington were slightly encouraging in the beginning, but they were so busy, and they were afraid of anything that they hadn't heard of, and most of those fellows never read a book about such things. So I ended up by building my house at Padua in rammed earth to prove it could be done. I think I told you about that. Then the county became frightened, and we had to Gunite it. But it would have been a very practical thing, and out in these desert areas the soil conditions were generally pretty good for it. But it was all exciting.

About the time that that project ended, I was asked by the War Department to become a war artist. I was called back to Washington. A project had been set up by George Biddle, who was one of the Philadelphia Biddles, a very good painter in his own right--and a man that I had met on some occasion, probably on a jury meeting or something in the East. He had put my name as one of some twenty

names that were first submitted to the War Department. After we were approved, we were all called to Washington to be told what the projects were to be like. We were told that with the various theaters of war, the South Pacific and Africa and England and so forth, that we could virtually select our own field, our own theater of war. We would be rated as lieutenant colonel and given the same privileges as an officer, but we would simply be involved with every facet of the fighting and everything that lies behind it. We would paint as an artist, not merely as illustrators, but whatever interpretation an artist would give to the whole problem, the whole tragedy and phenomenon of war.

GOODWIN: What was the motivation for having war artists?

SHEETS: Well, it's something that has been done by many countries for centuries, actually, and I think the point that Biddle made was that an artist would be able to interpret, as no other person could interpret, many aspects of the war. Of course, they had photographers that were doing a tremendous job in documentation, but Biddle was able to convince the War Department that artists were capable of a deeper type of interpretation and would be involved in more basic values and less concerned with what the eye sees and more of what really goes on. There seemed to be a great enthusiasm for this on the part of the War Department.

We went through the business of being properly indoctrinated into our jobs, and we were told, of course, of the tremendous responsibilities and secrecy and a lot of other things, uniformed properly, and were waiting to be sent abroad. I was in New York waiting in the middle of a sweltering summer, and I read the paper early one morning where Mr. Biddle had written an article. He was the first one who went out into the field. He went to Italy at the time of the first landing in Italy. He had written an article about how fantastic it was for an artist to be there in the middle of the war and to see the fighting and to see the flowers and to see a lot of other things. He waxed entirely too romantic about it because he wasn't that kind of a person, and it's strange that he would write what he did. But it was such a bad statement that the Congress immediately, within two days, killed the whole project. It just absolutely said that if that's the kind of thing that we're paying for, there isn't going to be any of it. It was a terrible shock to Biddle and to people in the War Department who really wanted this thing.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 10, 1976

SHEETS: I was in New York with four or five other artists--some of them were going to England and various places--when this complete stoppage of the program occurred. I was called by Washington immediately and informed, though the project had been stopped, to not leave New York because the government was making arrangements with Life magazine to take over the entire project, exactly as it had been outlined by the government in the War Department. Within a matter of, I think, hours, twelve hours or something like that, I got a call from Dan Longwell, who was then the editor of Life. Longwell was a fantastic man, a great man. He had great imagination, lots of fire, and tremendous flair for doing things. He called me, and I went over to Life magazine with the other men, and we were given a very exciting outline of what they had in mind. We were tied down again as to where we would like to go. Everybody seemed shocked when I said India-China-Burma, because I had always wanted to go to China. All my life, as a child, it meant so much to me for reasons that I can't even entirely explain. He was delighted, and after two or three days my orders were changed, and I was shipped back to California to eventually leave by Liberty ship from California to India.

GOODWIN: But you were still in the military?

SHEETS: Well, we became certified correspondents, which meant that you are and you're not. You're not actually part of the military force, but you're subject to all of their rules, regulations, and orders. Orders take time to be cut, and you simply have to follow the same orders exactly. But you're given the rating, as I said, of lieutenant colonel, which means that you have a certain amount of freedom, but at the same time it's in direct relationship to everything that the War Department or the army was planning.

I came back to California, and it was very interesting because the only means you had of getting to India from California was by Liberty ship. These Liberty ships were being built up and down the state and into Washington--and I guess in Oregon, but certainly Washington. They were built in twenty-nine days, they were loaded in fourteen, and you took off. The shakedown cruise in our case consisted of going outside San Pedro harbor and going down to about Newport and back to Los Angeles harbor in three round trips to figure out how far off the compass was. The compass was certainly not correct, but they made the notations of what the inaccuracy was. I think we left at eight or nine in the morning, and by about five o'clock that afternoon in the middle of June, we headed right off the west end of Catalina on our way to the South Pacific and then to India.

Well, the captain was a fantastic man, [William] Crum. He was a captain in the navy for many years, and then he'd become a merchant marine and worked for Luckenbach Lines until he was taken back by the navy to be put in charge of a merchant vessel. Tragically, he had had two ships torpedoed out from under him already during the war, and he was like a man walking on eggs. He was a very gutsy guy, but he was extremely emotional and very high-strung, as were most of the crew members. There were four men on that crew that had had three ships shot out from under them. One man in particular, the ship's carpenter, had been in an open lifeboat for twenty-nine days, and everyone else in the lifeboat died. That was really such a shocking experience to me--to meet these men and to eventually get the stories out of them and to know what the war had really meant to them, to these people. We had been sitting here in a comfortable situation and didn't really have any sense at all what war was, and that was my first introduction.

We took off, as I said, just without any shakedown cruise, really, and headed southwest. It was very amusing: we had a three-inch gun on the poop deck, but the Japanese submarines at that time had six-inch deck guns. They could have stood off out of our range and blown us right out of the sea. We were all alone, without convoy, and the gunners were on the poop deck day after day. They'd

throw boxes overboard, and then they would try to hit them. Well, they never hit a box. I was completely super cargo, along with six submarine officers who were being sent down to Tasmania to go over to Australia proper to join some submarine replacements. Having nothing to do, it intrigued me to make kites, like I did when I was a boy. We had plenty of line on board, and I made a kite about ten feet high that I put out about, I think, maybe three-eighths of a mile behind the ship. That kite was up for like six days straight, and it never had a bullet hole in it, though they shot at it continuously. These were the early days, before we got anywhere near the so-called war zone. It was just amusing to fly that kite. Once in a while we'd bring it in and take a look at it, and not a shrapnel, nothing had gone through it. They were a wonderful bunch of kids, but just as green as the rest of us. The guys in the gun tubs had these little machine guns which would have done very little damage except to somebody in an open boat.

I had to stand watch, the same as everyone else: four hours on and four hours off, right around the clock. It was interesting, and you learn an awful lot about what your eyes will do when you go up on a deck after you've been in a cabin. The people to be relieved don't leave for thirty minutes. After that thirty minutes, on the blackest night, when you think there's absolutely nothing

to see, you can see the horizon. Your eyes adjust to that so well, and it was an amazing experience going through that whole Pacific to be on that deck because the nights were incredibly beautiful at first, and there was phosphor in the water. You could even see the fish with the phosphorescence on them, and it was a wonderful experience in that early part.

Then things began to get tense, more tense, because the Japanese were knocking these Liberty ships down ahead of us and behind us even pretty regularly. We'd get signals, and we were all alone. Doing a little zigzagging didn't mean a hell of a lot, but we were zigzagging. They planned a course through so many hundreds of South Pacific islands that I wouldn't know how to count them. They told us there were several hundred, but we only saw one island, and that was the tip top of Moorea at dawn. The ship's first mate told me the night before if I'd get up at four o'clock, there would be a few minutes only that we'd see it over the horizon. The reason that we'd see it was that we couldn't get far enough away to not see that without being very close to an atoll, and the Japanese were infesting that area with observers.

So, as I said, things were getting more tense and more tense, and I was occupying my time by building furniture. The captain hated to live in his quarters. He wanted to sleep on the deck, so I built him a bed, and I

built him a couple of very interesting chairs that he could sit in and relax in as best he could at night. I got so well acquainted with fellows that had been through terrible experiences in open lifeboats. Many of them became very ill, after we were at sea. Much of the illness was mental, but they became terribly ill. One night they called me, and the ship's carpenter, who was a fellow I really liked, a fellow about forty, had passed out, absolutely cold. He was as rigid as a piece of wood or a piece of stone. In fact, his back was not quite flat on the bed in the middle, but was arched a little. His eyes had rolled up and disappeared. I thought he was dead when I walked in. Then I discovered that he was breathing a little and that his pulse was very, very low. The guy was a very brave man, but it got him, just plain fright, in the middle of the night in that darn ship to think in terms of another one going under. We put hot and cold towels on him and massaged him for three hours before he came to. And then he really didn't know where he was or why we were all there. It was a weird thing. I never had run into anything like this kind of psychology.

Then another thing had happened about that time. The third engineer, I guess, was the first avowed Communist I'd ever met. A Communist wasn't a common thing in those days though you heard about guys here and there. This fellow's job was to go down in the hold of the ship and

check the propeller shaft every so often. When the big lever would come around and it went by, he'd touch the bearing to see if it was getting warm and if it needed oil. One afternoon he became careless, and he zigged when he should have zagged. As he put his finger down, down came the tremendous force of this great lever, and it smashed his forefinger completely, the finger he had used to touch the bearing with, just absolutely smashed it. I heard this unholy roar, and it took about twenty-five minutes--because he fought everybody--to get him carried up the steep ladder, from the very bowels of the ship, to the captain's deck.

They got him into the captain's cabin, and I got a call from the captain to come immediately. I went up, and he said, "There isn't a doctor on board, and nobody knows anything about what to do. Do you know anything about what to do?" I said, "Well, I certainly don't, but have you got any kind of a first-aid kit?" I never saw a first-aid kit so big, as big as a suitcase, a huge thing, loaded with stuff. In the meantime, they had already given him a tremendous slug of whiskey, straight whiskey, and morphine, which don't work well together at all. They'd given him some morphine pills, and I think it and the whiskey just worked against each other, because he was in an absolutely horrible state and screaming. Needless to say, he hurt like hell. They couldn't hold

him. That blood was just getting on the ceiling and on the bed and on the floor and all over that room.
So finally I read in this pamphlet the word sulfa. It's interesting that sulfa had been discovered less than a year before this. It said that when at sea, you were to clean the wound as best you could and put tons of sulfa on it, and then wrap it up, and don't open till port. You know the number of sailors who died from gangrene at sea was so much greater than among people who get it on land. So I looked at this bloody thing, and it was just hanging there with threads, and the bone was all messed up. The captain said, "Well, you've just got to do something." So I performed an operation, which I'm not very proud of. I had to cut all those shreds off and cut one piece of bone off that was just dangling. The finger was simply gone, down to the first joint. Then I had them hold his hand up, and I started with some tape, from the lower joint, and I built a cornucopia. By the time it got up to here, it was about four inches in diameter. I poured that thing absolutely full of half of the bottle of sulfa. Then I took tape and went over it, over it, around it, until I made a big ball. Boy, talk about a man and a ball and a chain--this man on his right hand had a huge ball on the end of what used to be a finger. Finally, we calmed him down and he went to sleep. We were about ready to just knock him out, he was so obstreperous.

That crazy guy really drove us up the wall. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] After a day or two, he recovered enough to come on deck and proclaim how much money he was going to get out of the U.S. government for his own mistake. He became completely obnoxious. Well, there was a twenty-four-hour poker game on the ship, in the officers' quarters, and there was one in the crew's quarters. As a correspondent, I was the only one who could go both places. So I used to enjoy playing poker with these fellows when we had a few minutes, at very low stakes. When I went down to the crew's place, I saw hundreds of dollars in every pot. I couldn't believe it. Some of those people were so in debt that they would have to pay everything that they had made on the entire trip if they ever got back to the United States. The ship's cook was the top winner. He had everybody. He knew how to play poker and he had that poor crew whipped. But this third engineer used to sit there and say to us that he didn't know anything about poker, but he insisted on playing, with this damn finger in the air. There was a period that it smelled quite a bit. He'd hold that right up in front, and between what he said about what was wrong with our country and how much he was going to get out of it--and everybody knew it was his own fault--he wasn't a very well liked character.

As a matter of fact, when we got finally to Hobart,

Tasmania, the first thing we did, four of us got him into a taxi and took him to the hospital for a coming-out party, because we never had allowed him to take this bandage off. We went to the doctor, an English doctor up on the emergency ward, and explained the problem. He smiled and he started snipping. He snipped a little more and a little bit more, and pretty soon off came the bandage. There was the smoothest little blunt end of a joint you've ever seen. The doctor said, "Well, young man, there's nothing to stop you from going right on with your ship. You're in very good condition." I grabbed the doctor and took him outside and said, "Look, you go back and tell him that you're going to have to operate on it because if he goes back on the ship they're going to kill him. There's no question about it. He's never going to live through the trip." So the doctor went back and told him that on second thought, maybe that bone inside could be a little bit sharp, and eventually it might give him a little bit of trouble; so he better stay over for another boat. I often wonder if he ever got another boat and if he got killed. I've never known such a complete, miserable son of a gun as this fellow was.

Another thing that happened was that I painted a mural in the crew's galley. They had a very nice little crew's galley, and they were all so bored with life. It was a tough problem, because they were scared at the same

time. So I went down and painted these very good-looking ladies coming up out of the sea, crawling up on the boat, and I had a lot of fun doing it.

GOODWIN: What kind of art materials did you bring with you?

SHEETS: I had all my paints, fortunately. I had oil paint, and I had watercolors. So I just used my own paints to paint the mural. They were so excited, and we had a great big party the night that we celebrated the completion of the mural. Two days later, the second engineer forgot to turn off the pump motors when they were changing the oil. To keep the ship in balance, they have to pump oil into one side and then into the other side. About two days after I painted the mural, he forgot to turn off the pump, and the oil came through the ceiling of the ship's galley and went right down this whole wall. Of course it took days to clean the oil up so they could even use the galley. I must say the mural had a very definitely glazed look it never recovered from.

There were so many things that happened en route that it's incredible. About three weeks after we left San Pedro, a week and two days before we got to Hobart, Tasmania, every night about dusk, the men who were not on station began nearly always to climb up on top of the captain's bridge, because that was the time of night when the Japanese submarines would nearly always strike. They could get in

fairly close in the dusk, and then they could let you have it. It just seemed better to be up there if something like that happened. One night we'd been talking, the captain was there, and about five or six other men were there, when all of a sudden, about two miles behind us and off to the left, a rocket went up. If you don't think that made the hair on the back of your neck curl up! You've been out there for three weeks, you haven't seen a thing except for a few albatross and a few other birds, and then, suddenly, you see a rocket go up. At the same moment the "Sparks," who handled the radio, came running up and said, "I have a signal that there's an American lifeboat from a ship that was sunk astern, and could we pick them up?" Well, the captain's orders were absolutely under no circumstances to turn back, which sounds so cruel and so terrifying. The Japanese very often had our radios and had men who could speak English without accents, and they used them as decoys all over the place. Many ships were sunk as a result of that ruse. It was the most horrible feeling, going away, farther and farther from that signal. Then finally, about thirty minutes later, and it was really dark by this time, a second rocket went up. And I know everybody on that ship was sick at heart, and I know the captain was the sickest of all at the thought of not being able to do anything about it, but we went on.

Then, most tragic of all, that night, about midnight,

a storm hit us that was so terrifying. I've never known what a storm at sea was, though I thought I had in 1929 when I was on the Leviathan and the sea broke windows in the captain's bridge. But the Leviathan was so big that even though the storm was horrible, it didn't seem the same. This boat pitched around like a cork. No one could go on any deck for about three and a half days. We had to run with the storm way off course. The waves out at the sea were thirty feet high. Incredible breakers would come right in on top of you, and wind and driving, driving rain, just such continuous onslaughts of water, you just couldn't believe it. So that made us even feel worse, because if they had been our boys in lifeboats there was no way they could have survived the night.

Then we eventually landed in Hobart, which was the most dramatic harbor entrance I've ever seen in my life. It took a full day to go from the entrance of the harbor up the [Derwent River] mouth. The sea goes up probably twenty-five or thirty miles, and then eventually you get to Hobart, Tasmania. Well, we arrived there at dusk, and those of us who didn't have work to do were allowed to go ashore for the first time in thirty-two days. After we had disposed of the third engineer, about six of us--those naval fellows and I were the freest--went into the first bar we could get to, because there had been no liquor aboard. We had a round of drinks, and they said the bar

is closed. Well, we said, "The bar's closed? We just arrived." It was only like seven o'clock at night. They said, "Well, the bar's closed because you've used up all the liquor." So that was a kind of a surprise, but there were some other dives which some of the boys found. In fact, we found a very good little restaurant on the outskirts of town that had wine, and we all had a bottle of wine or two. No one was feeling very much pain.

I went back to the ship, and it was, oh, about two o'clock in the morning, and I heard a lot of racket about four. My cabin was almost exactly where you enter the ship, and I poked my head out of the door. The second engineer had been ordered to stay on the ship and to work on the propeller shaft, as there was a certain amount of vibration in the shaft, and he was not given shore leave. He had simply ducked overboard the minute we got there. So as he came aboard, the first engineer said, "You're under arrest, sir." The second engineer immediately lunged at him and struck him, which in wartime is mutiny. It was so ridiculous, in a sense. Of course, he had no business to leave the ship and he was very drunk, utterly drunk. I had to sit in as a witness at the trial two mornings later, just before we left. They had some very high naval officers who were in Hobart, Tasmania, along with some British naval officers, and they held a court-martial. The prisoner sat there with a great ball and chain, which was the first time

I'd ever seen anything like that. He was immediately flown back to the United States, and he was sentenced to twenty years. Now, I doubt very much if he spent twenty years, but that was how tough they were in order to keep this kind of thing from happening.

We were there for three days, and then we took off. I noticed, when we were loading the ship, some very strange cargo was going on board in addition to food. I was down in the hold talking to someone about something, and I saw these huge cases of ale. There were some other liquor and a little bit of beer, but mostly ale and hard liquor, rum. It was absolutely prohibited that this be brought aboard.

We took off late in the afternoon, down this dramatic channel, islands like I've never seen. The hills on both sides were absolutely covered with eucalyptus that flowed over it like great waves. You can't imagine. There was snow on the ground as, you see, it was wintertime down there. In fact, we went to 45 degrees south latitude, which was almost 800 miles south of Hobart, before coming up into Tasmania. We were east of New Zealand, trying to avoid those submarines--and we did avoid them, because we never sighted one, and we certainly were not struck. So as we left, it was very dramatic.

The captain disappeared that night. He's probably dead now, so I think it's safe enough to say that. He became completely drunk for four days. The ship was in

a very precarious situation. We were down in the Great Australian Bight in the middle of tremendous storms, going south of Australia. It's about 3,000 miles just through that Great Australian Bight. The first mate was trying to be everything to everybody. The worst of it during that period was that it was the middle of the second day when I had a call to come to the captain's quarters, along with a young man who was actually a lieutenant in the army. Again, here's a case of tremendous waste. They sent this young lieutenant on this ship to check out the cargo when it arrived in India. He supposedly was to check the cargo during the trip, a couple of times going down into the hold, but there was no way you could check quantities or anything like that. How ridiculous it was to send a man all that distance just to read a list as it came off, when all they had to do was to send a list any number of other ways. But anyway, that's what the army did in those days. This young man was a charming young fellow, a graduate of the University of California, and he had just been married, which, as with a lot of other fellows, was a hell of a tough time to leave. He had been born in China, the son of a missionary. The captain of a ship, of course, is such a potent person, the absolute ruler of a ship, with absolute control. Occasionally during the voyage, down at officers' mess, the captain would ask this young man about God, always in a sarcastic and very deliberately mean way. It was never to try to

learn anything. He evidently didn't think much of God.

So when he became drunk, he sent for the two of us. In my life, I've never seen anything as filthy as that cabin. There was shit on the floor; there was the most terrible stench and old food lying around. The boys would bring him food, but they never dared to clean the quarters because he raised so much hell. [tape recorder turned off]

The first thing he did was pour two very large, dirty glasses full of rum, handed a glass to each of us, and said to this young lieutenant, "Drink it down." I found out later this boy had never had a drink in his life. I think that he would have been willing to if he had to drink it, but the combination of this order and the confusion and the mess of the stateroom and all the rest of it was so ghastly. Well, he took one glug of it and nearly coughed up his stomach. He wasn't used to anything like that. I didn't even touch mine. Then the captain said, "All right now," and he's lying there. He had a pair of the filthiest shorts on and nothing else, and he's just lying there like a Roman drunk. He said, "All right now, tell me about God." Well, this poor kid, he was only twenty-two or -three or -four, and he just didn't know how to handle this situation. I didn't know how to handle it because I knew this man was really tough, and you can't cross the captain. So he just browbeat him, kept making him drink a little, and every once in a while he'd say to me, "Now,

you see, he doesn't know anything about God." Finally, the captain just passed out, and we took off in a hell of a hurry.

We went down to the cabin, and I said, "Well, I don't know whether this thing is going to be repeated or not, but it's an unholy situation, and we've got to be extremely careful how we handle it." And sure enough, about four hours later, back came the message, "Come back." The captain had this incredible thing that he was just hooked with, to drive at this thing which bothered him, because the lieutenant was a very nice young man and obviously a good example of a guy who lived a decent life. So he started in all over again. This time he was very mean about it, and he pushed him around and was ornery as hell. Finally, I said to this young fellow, "You beat it. Just take off. Let me talk to this man." He was drowsy and miserable, so he left. Now, this sounds like it was the second time, but I think this was the sixth time we went through this. Every time it would last about a half an hour, and the room got filthier and filthier--impossible.

We finally went up for the last time. I told him before we went up, I said, "Now, when we get up there you stick your head in the door and then just beat it, because this can't go on." I didn't know whether he would shoot us or what the hell he'd do, but I wasn't going to put up with it any longer. So finally, when he left, I said,

"Now, captain, this is wrong. This is a good young man, and you're not in any fit condition to talk like this to him, and neither of us are coming back again, period." I said, "You're drunk, and you ought to be ashamed." And I just walked out before he had a chance to do a damn thing about it. That was about six o'clock one night.

The next morning, I've never seen anything like the change. Here he was up, shaved, clean, with a clean uniform, at breakfast. And of course he didn't mention it, and we didn't mention it. But it was a weird, terrible experience to see how a man with that much power, if he had wanted to, could have shot him or shot me or shot both of us, because that's the power of a ship's captain. But I do think it brought the captain and me a little bit closer. He talked to me a great deal more after that, and we had some very pleasant exchanges of experiences and ideas.

We finally got around the big bend of the south coast of Australia and headed up to Ceylon. This was the part they feared the most, as far as the Japanese were concerned, because they had their huge cruisers that were equipped strictly for war, and they could outrun anything two-to-one. They were sweeping up there, knocking these Liberty ships off just like they were tenpins. The ridiculous thing about this whole course was that when I went aboard the ship the first day, the

captain took me into his cabin and said, "Now, you're the only person besides me who knows where we're going, and you're absolutely under orders never to mention where we're going." I said, "Yes, sir," and of course I didn't, and we took off. He called me up, about four days after we left, to his cabin one day, and he said, "I want you to read this." He handed me a Reader's Digest that had just come out before we left, and in the center spread it had the map of the Liberty ships to India, completely laid out, the exact course that we followed, right to a tee. So he complained about that all the way, the fact our actual itinerary had been published in the Reader's Digest. So the secrecy didn't amount to anything.

But anyway we didn't get chased by any big ships, and we felt great when we got to Ceylon. We were there about four hours while the captain went ashore to get certain orders. Now, what we had in the ship was high octane gasoline, and 1,000-pound and 500-pound aerial bombs, small arms and ammunition, and a deckload of P-38s, which wasn't exactly the kind of a cargo you'd like to have if you're going to be in trouble.

We finally left Ceylon and headed for Madras. It was terribly exciting for me to land in Madras because it was the first time that I could really spend any time on shore in India, although it was only part of a day. We were unloading the P-38s at Madras, all on the deck,

and a lot of other deck cargo--jeeps and trucks and so forth. I went into town and saw what I think I mentioned once before, about Will Levington Comfort, the writer who had written so much on India. Did I mention that? I thought I had. Well, anyway, I saw what I had always dreamed India was like when I went to Madras, because it's a great religious center. Here were ancient old men sitting on, in one case I remember, a tall stump--it must have been ten feet off the ground, the top of it--and sitting up there in the lightest clothing with a beard way down, that at least touched his tummy, sitting up there just contemplating the world. That whole city was so filled with these ancient old monks and young priests and all sorts of temples that I thought, well, India was what I had really dreamed it was like. It was the only place in India--and I spent almost a year there--that was like what I had always dreamed of. Madras is absolutely unique. There are marvelous temples everywhere, north of and all around Madras in every part of India, but here there were more people per square foot than any place I've ever been on earth.

Well, that night as we were coming out of the harbor, the captain called me up to his bridge. We'd become pretty good friends by this time. He said, "I dread the next twenty-four hours more than the entire trip. This is the most dangerous water--tides are incredible. They change

constantly. They're not dependable." He said, "We have to stay quite close to the coast because of the fact that those Japanese ships were running out there knocking our ships out of the water. We have to stay within about twenty miles of coastline all the way. It's a dangerous, dangerous trip." So, anyway, we started off, and I went to bed.

At three o'clock in the morning, I heard the most fantastic jangling of bells. I slept right underneath the captain's bridge, and I could hear every bell in the engine room perfectly because of the shaft or something. And it was just a tremendous ruckus. Then I heard people running on the captain's bridge over my head. I jumped up, went out on the deck, and looked out. It was a dark night, but there was just enough starlight so that I could see, and not twenty feet away on my right were huge rocks. I couldn't imagine how we could be so near big rocks. At that point I felt a jolt, as we drove into the sand right beside those rocks. Well, the captain had been sound asleep on the bridge in that bed I'd made for him, and he had awakened out of a sound sleep and jumped up screaming, "Hard left and full speed astern." He knew from the echo of the sound of the engines that we were that close to grounding, and that the worst was on the right. If he hadn't given that order we'd have gone straight into the rocks, and the whole damn ship could have blown up. But

as it happened, we missed the rocks, this very heavy rocky point, by about ten or twelve feet, and we went into pure sand. Well, I was standing out there just wondering what the hell was going to happen now, and this captain looked down from up on the bridge, and he said, "Well, God damn it, you've been wanting to go to India. Step off. There she is, mother India."

I could have jumped right off onto the rocks, practically. The mate came down and dropped a lead to see how much water we were drawing in the middle of the ship, where I was. We had fourteen inches of clearance in the middle, so we were well aground. Well, he talked a great deal about what they would have to do, and that they would have to wait for high tide. They waited for high tide, and then started their engines up, and they went "glug, glug, glug, glug..." and stopped. The condensers filled up instantly with sand. The propellers were so close to the ground that they churned up so much sand that the condensers were immediately filled. Because they're hot, it took, I think, six hours before they could take them out to clean them. And we missed that tide completely. In the meantime there were little dirigibles flying over us and airplanes flying over us, trying to get us to break radio silence, but the captain wouldn't do it. I was up on the bridge with him, and he had a pistol lying on the top of his wardrobe.

When there was nobody else in the cabin, he said, "If I don't get off of here," he said, "I'm going to use that." He said, "All my papers will be in that drawer. I can't, I just can't, face losing another ship. I just can't face it after all the things that I've been through." Well, they got the next tide, and by going just maybe, "glug, glug," and then waiting, they gradually floated clear. It took seven hours to get that ship, under the best tide, out where we knew we were free, and then they didn't dare to really start moving because the water was so shallow. But we got out by about, oh, eight o'clock at night. We crept out and very slowly went up the balance of the trip to the mouth of the Jumna River, where we had to wait until the next morning because they won't let you go up during the night. There were about six Liberty ships out there, all in the area waiting. We started up the river when daylight came.

Well, for somebody born and raised in California, the sight of what we saw going up that river was almost too much. It takes a full day to go up the river in a big ship to Calcutta, it's that far inland. It's on a great delta. You know, the delta comes out and you go up right in through the delta, which is built up by the river. We'd gone up about twenty miles when I began to see bodies floating down the river. If you've never seen that, it's a little bit hard to explain how shocking it

is. Because I'd always heard they'd burned everybody in India when they died, I couldn't understand why these people were floating down the river. I didn't know that they were having the greatest famine ever known in India and that people were dying like flies. During the first three months I was there 1,300,000 people died from hunger. They were people that had migrated for such a long distance--to them, not to us--but for 500 to 800 miles toward Calcutta. Most of them were so weak that when they got there they died, and they were just thrown in the river, like cord-wood. It was the only place to do it; they didn't have the wood or manpower for cremation.

Well, going up that river was the most amazing combination of being shocking and enchanting, because the villages that I saw were so beautiful with this tropical, jungly background, people and temples all along the way, and still bodies floating down. Every time you looked around, there came another one. I'll never forget it.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 10, 1976

SHEETS: We arrived up at the King George docks. I took a taxi from there to the Far Eastern Hotel to check in. When I had left Los Angeles, they told me that was headquarters, but when I arrived there I discovered that they had moved the headquarters six blocks. And in walking six blocks, I counted nineteen dead bodies, lying on the sidewalk, by the curb and in the gutters, and probably 150 people that were in various stages of dying. You'd think this person was dead, and then maybe a hand would slowly turn over. It was the most shocking thing in the world to find yourself in that kind of situation. Equally shocking was the fact that on the window of this hotel was posted an eight-course dinner. It was a horrible kind of affair because the Bengal government of India was trying to blame the British, and the British were trying to blame the Bengal government. There had been a terrible drought, and crops had failed. This was followed by two successive years of hurricanes, and food, seed and everything else had run out. The tragedy was that these people had heard about this mythical city, Calcutta, which was anywhere from 400, 500 miles to 1,000 miles away, and whole family groups simply migrated on foot. I must say that the men did give their food to the children and the women, and

they nearly always died first. The family groups were so pathetic; you can't believe what famine does to bodies. The Indians, at least in that section of India, did not fight for food. I saw people die in the middle of food that was piled high in markets. By markets, I mean little narrow alleyways with raised floors where the merchants sat--maybe eighteen inches or twenty-four inches above the floor level--and lying in these narrow alleyways were family groups. If they reached up with a hand without even sitting up they could have gotten various kinds of food. But I don't believe that in their way of life they ever would have made that effort. I think it's just impossible to conceive of it, having watched people die like that.

Well, of course I was not completely off course, and I spent the first two weeks in India covering the famine. I went into villages where not a soul was alive. I went out with an American officer in a jeep, and we saw things that were beyond my comprehension: whole villages being cleaned up by jackals and buzzards. That's the only garbage disposal they had. They say that about 3,000,000 people migrated, and 1,300,000 of them died. I saw great lines of people that were being fed by individuals. The lines would be 500 people long. They would come up, the last part of them, to a place where they would be dished a little rice, a little soup, or something, and the food

would run out. They would have to wait until the next day, and they formed the front of the line. It was the most pathetic thing in the world. I made a whole group of drawings, paintings, which I sent back to Life, where they were printed in an issue on the famine. [Life, XV:21, November 22, 1943]

GOODWIN: Did you paint right on the scene?

SHEETS: I made little pen sketches. I made the paintings after I got back to headquarters at New Delhi or someplace where I could work. You couldn't paint under those conditions. But I have a good memory, and I made enough drawings so that it was very clear.

Then, after checking in at Calcutta for a day or two, after I'd finished this roughly two weeks in the famine area, I flew up to Delhi with the British in an airplane that looked like it was put together with chewing gum and women's hairpins. I've never seen such an outfit. They were a wonderful bunch of guys, marvelous pilots, but I really couldn't believe the airplane itself after being accustomed to American airplanes. I arrived in Delhi about ten o'clock in the morning, and by this time I had the old Calcutta crud. Oh, I was so ill. I had a terrible fever and the dysentery and all the things that go with it. I really thought I was going to die and hoped I would, I felt so horrible.

I was taken to an officers' billet in a funny kind

of a so-called hotel. They took me up to this room and said, "That's your bed." You had to crawl over about four beds to get to it. There were thirty beds in the room. You had a footlocker at the bottom of it, and that was it. At that time of day, there wasn't anyone there, and I finally got into bed. Even with blankets on and my uniform on I was shivering. I finally went to sleep. Then I broke out in the usual thing, cold sweat and all the rest of it. I was miserable.

I went back to sleep again, and about three o'clock in the afternoon I was violently shaken by someone, and I didn't even know where I was. I was, you know, in that bewildered state, and after all the experiences I'd been through for two and a half months--because the last half of the trip took thirty days on the Liberty ship (the total was sixty days from California to India), plus this other two weeks, and the bewildering variety of those experiences, and the intensity of them--I was just dead out. Well, this guy was shaking the hell out of me, and I finally roused up enough to look at him. He said, "What in the hell are you doing in India?" And it was a friend of mine that I used to meet pretty regularly in Southern California tennis tournaments, a fellow by the name of Hal Service, who was an excellent tennis player, a damn good tennis player. He nearly always beat me in the finals or semifinals. He said, "Come on now. Get up. We're going to go play tennis."

And boy, just the thought of that was the most sickening thing I ever thought of, but he finally persuaded me to get dressed and go with him. He didn't say where he was going, and I was terribly shaky, but I finally struggled out. It was so good to see someone that I knew, and I felt practically half-cured by that.

We go downstairs, and we get into a jeep. It had a big flag, I remember, a big long stick up on the front pole with a flag on it. Boy, he hightailed it out somewhere in this thing, going like a bat out of hell. He had a couple of tennis rackets. We'd go by some very important-looking buildings, up a hill between more important-looking buildings. I found out later that they were the general headquarters for the British army on one side, and the navy, I think, on the other. Then we went right through the biggest gates I've ever seen, and right up to the steps of the viceroy's palace.

Standing on the steps waiting for Hal Service was the viceroy of India [Lord Victor A.J.H. Linlithgow], the Jam Saheb of Nawanger, and the aide to the viceroy, who turned out to be a second cousin to the king of England. They were all dressed to play tennis. I was introduced, sickly as I was, and followed them down through the most beautiful gardens, fantastic gardens, to these beautiful tennis courts. They had two of the most exciting sets of doubles. They were just marvelous. The Jam Saheb of Nawangar was at

that time the head of the chamber of princes, educated in Oxford, and a brilliant guy. He weighed about 230 or 240 pounds, and he probably wasn't over five feet six high. But I think you could say he was floating power. He had a fantastic ability at tennis and moved very beautifully on the court. They had two great sets of tennis, which I thoroughly enjoyed watching, lousy as I felt.

Finally they came over and sat down, under the great awnings. It looked like a real Oriental palace certainly, down there with all those pools and the tennis courts. They were having drinks. The young colonel--well, he wasn't so young. He was probably older than I was. I was then someplace in my thirties, and he was probably in his early forties. He came over and sat down beside me, and he said, "Tell me again, what was your name?" I told him. He smiled in the funniest way, and he said, "I want you to come with me." So we walked, and it killed me to walk, back up this hill, up many, many steps--I mean at least 100 feet up; we were down that low--up to the viceregal palace. The palace was laid out in such a way that there was a main central part, and then two wings went off at 45-degree angles at each end. One of those wings was his. Being related to the king and being aide to the viceroy, he had a real position. We went through a living room, beautiful quarters, into a huge library. He walked around that library a little while, and then

walked around that library a little while, and then he got on a little ladder and went up, and came down with a book. I couldn't believe it, but it was a book that was published on my work in 1938 [Millard Sheets, by Merle Armitage]. In addition to that, he had four magazines that I had things appear in in England, mainly, the London Studio magazine many times during the thirties. It turned out that he was a watercolor painter and that he absolutely loved to paint more than anything else. But serving as he was in the army, he didn't have time to paint. But he had become interested in my work through these peculiar circumstances of these books and magazines. He'd written for the book, having seen the magazines.

Well, as a result of that, my whole experience in India was changed because it was his duty as the aide to the viceroy to arrange everything that went on in the viceroy's palace. So, through Lord [Victor A.J.H.] Linlithgow, the viceroy, who was only there for about six weeks after I arrived, I was invited to at least six or seven beautiful parties, including dinner parties in the viceregal mansion because my friend wrote the lists of guests. I got to know him and enjoy him very much, and Linlithgow was an interesting character, a tall, skinny guy who was very much the old-type Englishman, the old type you'd think that you knew ran India. When they retired him and brought out Lord [Archibald P.] Wavell,

who was the General Wavell who had won the battle of Africa, you had a totally different situation.

Lord Wavell arrived with his wife and their daughter at the airport, and he was sworn in at the airport as the viceroy of India. He got right back in the plane, flew directly to Calcutta, and in three days stopped the whole famine. In three days he had every so-called indigent in rest camps. Some of them were too far gone to save, but they were given decent treatment. There was at all times ample food. There was no lack of food. This was a political situation where human life meant nothing, and it was a tragedy to beat any that I have ever witnessed. I wasn't in Germany when Hitler operated, but it was as close to that kind of incredibility. He went down, moved through that area for about three or four days in helicopters and various other ways, and stopped the whole thing, just like that.

He came back and, again, I continued to be involved in things that went on out at the viceroy's palace, because the same man remained as his aide. I thoroughly enjoyed Lord Wavell and his wife and their daughter. They were charming, interesting, very simple people, and I don't know how many times I had dinner with just the Wavells and this young colonel, just the five of us. I did get to know them, both Lord and Lady Wavell, quite well.

Later on, they held a major exhibition of war artists,

and that meant all the free artists. There were some French artists; there were of course many British and quite a few Americans by this time. It was an exciting experience, and Mrs. Wavell was really a tremendous person. Well, I'm getting ahead of my story, but just for example, after I had been there something like six or seven months, this exhibition was held, and I had a great many paintings from the famine and a great many of the war. I took them down to have them put into the exhibit, then I went back to the preopening of the exhibit to be with Mrs. Wavell and this young colonel. As we walked through, we couldn't find my work. It simply wasn't on view. Finally Mrs. Wavell asked the question, not of this colonel but of another young colonel who hung the exhibit where my paintings were. In a rather embarrassed way, he opened a door and took us into a room that was simply closed off, and there they were all hung. She had the greatest dignity I've ever known. They turned on the light and she looked at every picture very carefully. She talked to me about each one of them, and then after she had really looked at the exhibit, she turned to this colonel and said, "Colonel, will you please close the exhibit now, and I expect these to be properly hung tomorrow." They hung them there because of the political problem of the famine, but that wasn't going to affect Lady Wavell for one second. So my paintings were put right out in the middle of the exhibition the next morning when the

thing opened. But that's the kind of a person she was, and Lord Wavell was the same. He was an amazing guy. He had lost an eye, but he had this marvelous spirit. That patch was very dominating in the way he wore it.

I quickly learned that out of thirty-four correspondents in the C-B-I theater, the China-Burma-India theater, not one of them was at the front. It certainly wasn't because they didn't want to go. The British had the final control and wouldn't allow them. They wouldn't give them visas to go to China. They wouldn't let the orders be cut. They wouldn't let them go where the fighting was down in South Burma, which was the Arakan. Here everyone was, tied down, trying to write stories about the war and getting it all from releases that were very, very inconsequential. That was a bad experience, just to be there with a bunch of guys that had not enough to do. They would write their stuff in about thirty minutes in the morning and then hope that some of it would be filed. It was very exasperating. My greatest pleasure was to go to the races with the colonel on Saturdays, where they had fantastic horse racing. I played tennis and played a little bit of squash. I would paint most of the day, then do these other things in the free time.

Well, it was at that time, about two months after I arrived in India, that Lord Mountbatten arrived as the supreme commander of the whole Far East theater. Needless

to say, again, I was a guest at the first dinner for Mountbatten. To my complete pleasure and surprise, I sat at his right at a small table for five people. We had a most pleasant conversation. He was a charming man, full of real spirit and excitement about this new challenge to him to put it all together. He finally got around to saying, "Well, what are you doing exactly as a correspondent?" I explained very simply that I wasn't doing what I thought I came to India to do, which was to go to war. He listened, and I finally explained that there were thirty-four people tied down.

He said, "Would you like to go to the Arakan?" I said, "I certainly would." He clapped [claps hands] his hands a couple of times, and from among all the aides who stood up at the bar eating a few feet away, his chief aide came over. He said, "Get in touch with Air Marshal Joubert immediately, and set up a flight for Mr. Sheets to Chittagong. When would you like to go, Mr. Sheets, tomorrow?" I thought he was just giving me a leg-pulling job, and I said, "No, but I'd like to go the day after tomorrow. I need one day to get ready." He said, "Day after tomorrow, set up a flight, and have him met and flown by a small plane right down to the front on the next day." He said, "Then, I want him to be with Tony Beauchamp," who was a reporter for the army, not a correspondent. He took motion pictures and documentaries for the British army. This all happened so fast.

He said, "You're serious?" I said, "Well, you're darn right I'm serious." He said, "Well, it's all set up." He called me personally the next morning and said that everything had been completed.

Well, to my utter surprise, here I was ready to go. I covered the Arakan battle for all the correspondents in that theater for two months because none of them were allowed to get there. I got word back to them from which they made many releases. I didn't plan to be a war correspondent, but I did get them the material they needed to make it more alive.

Well, I arrived down there, and it was really an experience. Chittagong, I'll never forget, was a sort of funny airport out in the middle of the jungle. At that time they were having sweeps regularly from Zeroes coming up from the front, and they were losing planes and having dogfights all over the place. I slept in a basha. The night before, they'd gotten a boa constrictor ten feet long nearby they told me. I thought for a while they were just pulling my leg, but I found out they actually did get him. I was introduced to the kind of horrible food that you get in the British army. I was introduced with one fell swoop, and I never have had worse food, worse everything, filthy, which was because of the fact that it was impossible to keep it otherwise.

I was then flown down to the jungle. I landed on a

little airstrip, where some British fliers were flying that marvelous plane, the Spitfire. It was the first time I saw a fighting strip right at the front. There was a strip cut out of the jungle, a very heavy jungle there, and then there were these little side cuts where they kept the airplanes. After they'd get a call that the Zeroes were headed up, they would be in the air in about two and a half minutes, whether they were in bed asleep or down in the bar or in the kitchen or wherever they might be. I never saw such a bunch of guys. They were fellows who had been flying, by this time, some of them, four and a half years. They had been in France, had come out of France, then they had been sent to Singapore and driven the full length of the Malaya peninsula.

They were terrific fighters. In fact, the first evening I was there--I was there two evenings before I was met by the jeep, and in two evenings we had two sweeps of Zeroes. I've never seen anything like when they took off. The gong would ring, and they'd run for their planes. The idea was to beat the other guy off, and there was no caution. They'd come out of those places, and if two planes were side by side, they'd practically lock wings taking off together. I've never seen such gutsy guys. They would take off, and there were dogfights. A couple of them were shot down. The pilots escaped, actually; they parachuted down. But it was my first introduction to real fighting.

Then I was met by Beauchamp, who was a marvelous fellow. He was about six foot two, very intelligent, extremely handsome and artistic. He took photographs, but he also painted. His father was an architect. He had a lot of background in art. We really had quite a time together, because it was always interesting to be with him, except that he constantly got us into trouble. He couldn't get enough war. He couldn't get enough fighting, so we always got into scrapes.

A man by the name of Sharp, who had been the head of news in London for the BBC for all the war up to that time, was, in order to get a rest, sent to India and then to the Arakan. He joined us for about four days and rode around in our jeep with us. He was a charming guy and a terrific conversationalist. Beauchamp talked the two of us into a real thing. He said, "Now, tomorrow there's going to be the most incredible fight, an attack on Bamboo Hill. We've been trying to take Bamboo Hill for three solid years. Every year we've made an attempt, and every year we can't get past it. We're sometimes driven back farther, but we never can get past Bamboo Hill." They jelly bombed it, they put continuous dive bombing on it, long-range artillery on it, but the Japanese would just go down into their bunkers and play pinochle until the bombing was over, and then they'd come up and thumb their noses at the British. You could see them; I saw them many,

many times. The British had worked for months to get some tanks sent out to the Arakan, and they'd assembled them all in the jungle, but they couldn't bring them out without exposing them. So for three nights, every night they'd bring them down slowly towards this front. And this attack was going to be the next morning. Beauchamp said, "Now, if you two guys go out with me, I can bribe one of the sentries." He led us out until we were right in the middle between the two lines, and there was a place there where we could park for the night. Beauchamp said to me, "Next morning, when these nine tanks are ready to come in, Millard, you drive the jeep, get right in as close as you can to that big first tank, right behind it. The colonel that's in charge of this tank attack will be in it, and we'll follow him right in. And then at a certain point"--and he showed me a map, all drawn very carefully--"we'll make a hard left turn and cut off and get behind a hill, a little low hill that will keep us protected."

Well, you know, you get kind of stirred up. You've seen so much agony, and we never thought they were ever going to do anything down there. I had seen guys just massacred. I went through part of that time, for over thirty days, when we never took our boots off. It was during the monsoon, and the rain was horrible. We'd been going over cliff roads and being shot at, and just things you can't believe. Well, this night we did what he said.

It was a semimoonlit night, only semi. We drove out, and he bribed the sentry, and we got out in front. At about 200 yards we pulled off to the left, where grass was about five feet high. We drove the jeep right in, and we had a big tarp that we had taken for this purpose. The three of us pulled it out as tight as we could, and we got the four corners and pulled them out. Then we just stamped on the tarp until we got the grass down. Here we were sitting in little pockets surrounded by the high grass. We just had gotten comfortably settled about eight-thirty at night when this fantastic artillery fire began from our side shooting over toward the Japanese. We were right under it. The shells were going over, boom, boom, boom, boom--just so close you couldn't believe it. Then they started on the other side. We could hear every shell, probably no more than fifty feet above us. This bombardment went on for about three hours. It was a horrible experience. I'd never sat under that kind of canopy before. Finally it stopped. By this time we were plenty willing to go to sleep. We had our bedrolls and I went to sleep.

In a couple of hours, I guess, I heard the most unearthly scream. If there was one thing that we didn't want to hear, it was anybody scream, because we were right out in the middle between the lines and we didn't know how close the Japanese were to us. Sharp was just screaming in agony. I had a flashlight, so I put it so just the

tiniest little beam of light came through between my fingers. As I hit this tiny beam of light on his face, the biggest bat you'd ever seen, that had been absolutely fastened to the front of his face, took off. He was scratched and dug and clawed by this creature, and his face was the goddamnedest mess of ribbons you've ever seen. He was just hysterical, and I don't blame him. I mean, God knows if he had any idea of what it was that was on his face. But a big old hairy bat that was at least ten inches (and maybe bigger) across was something to scare the hell out of you. Well, nobody slept anymore that night. I put my face right straight down under my blanket, and my bedroll up over my head.

We waited until the beginning of dawn when we heard this little bit of rumbling, so we jumped up and picked up our cameras and got into the jeep. Of course, we never undressed or anything like that. We got into the jeep, and I got behind the wheel, Sharp sits on the little back poop deck, and Tony Beauchamp stood up right beside me in the jeep with his camera. He had an old-fashioned camera, the kind you used to have to wind. The first tank came by us and went about fifty feet up ahead and stopped. So I drove right up and got right behind it, very close to it. The big turret door opened, and the colonel climbed up and stuck his head out and stood there with his binoculars to study the scene ahead.

I should have said that all this time there was a fantastic amount of bombing going on, mostly dive bombing, which was followed with great waves of Liberators. Later I flew with the same fellows who did this, so I knew the story from both ends. There were about five planes in each echelon, one and then two and then three. The lead bombardier, at a certain point when he was over the target with his bombsight, would cut loose, and then instantly the others would cut loose following his release, which made a saturation bombing out of it. They were followed by one wave after another. One would go across this way, one would go across that way, and so forth. They were going like spokes of a wheel in every direction. As this particular group went over, and they were coming exactly toward us, I was watching the plane up there above me.

All of a sudden I realized that this echelon was coming toward us. This group of five had released their bombs too late, and they were going to come right down our way. There wasn't any question in the world about it. Well, there's nothing that you can do. I knew that there was no way those bombs were going to miss us.

Later I talked to the bombardier himself who made that mistake as well as with the captain of the plane when I flew with them four or five months later. What had happened was that as the bombardier went over the target--and it was his first flight and he was excited--

he didn't release the bomb quite in time. There was so much ack-ack in the air and there were so many Zeroes around, that instead of going around again, he let go, only maybe three seconds or four seconds beyond where he should have let go.

Well, behind us were the rest of the tanks, and then there were about 10,000 Gurkha troops and a lot of British troops and a lot of Indian troops. They had evacuated all the natives that were anywhere near this area a week before, to a village back about three miles. What happened was that the first bomb struck just about 125 or 130 feet from us, and then from there on they went for three miles. It's the most incredible thing to see a bomb hit, then the cattle in the fields just roll over and the men the same. It was like a fake motion picture, an incredible experience of seeing so many people die and so instantly. The colonel who was looking out above the turrets was decapitated, and his head fell right in front of us. The only thing that saved us was our exact location in relation to that tank. We were so close to it that it served as a shield. Everything around us, behind us, and in front of us was knocked out. Well, there was complete consternation when the colonel was killed, but some men climbed up and pulled the body down, somebody else took his place, and the tank group started.

What my friend Beauchamp had talked us into was that

when this attack starts, we'll be able to take photographs like nobody's ever taken. "We're going to go right in with a tank in the foreground and these dive bombers and the other bombers and all this stuff, and we're going to be perfectly safe. We'll pull off to the side." Well, we went in just like he planned it. By this time there was so much going on, there was such a terrible bunch of confusion because the soldiers had been killed and the tank commander killed and so much else that it was absolutely awful. We went on down maybe 200 or 300 yards, and then we made our quick turn to the left and parked in behind a hill that was about as high as this room. But it maybe was 150 feet in diameter, something like that, maybe 200 feet. It had fairly tall dead grass on it, about like that. [points] Then Beauchamp said, "Okay, we're going to have a grandstand seat. We'll just climb up on our bellies, up to the top of this hill, and we'll watch the whole thing." Well, it didn't sound very good to me, but I didn't know where else to go, so we climbed up and slithered up this hill. We got up there, and we were peeking through just little pieces of the grass. The tanks were going on in, lumbering in and shooting like mad, and the dive bombers were coming in. There was more artillery behind us.

All of a sudden, Beauchamp just stood up and started panning this way and that with that damned camera of his.

It didn't take more than about ten seconds before the machine guns started raking our hill. Boy, I never got as close to the ground in my life. We were just barely over the hill on the right side. And we crawled away from there as fast as we could. I won't repeat the things that I said to him. He thought it was just funny as hell. In about five minutes we're in a new place, and he stands up again, and we have a repeat performance. That went on for about three hours. Every little while he'd get up and take another whack at it. Finally, I just got as near as I could to the jeep and didn't dare move. By this time, they're dropping mortar fire. You know what a mortar is? It's a lob. You just throw something over, like you'd throw a tennis ball over a fence. This stuff was going all over. It was enough to cure me for all time of the whole idea of war.

But it took about six hours before we felt safe enough to get in that jeep and make a run for it. We couldn't go back the way we came up--that was completely a fighting area--so we went back through a little jungle trail (that's all it was) and finally got back. That was a real introduction to being under fire. Of course we had a lot of it.

I was in the jungle later with a bunch of Welsh troops that had been fighting for four solid years on the ground. They didn't even get letters from home. They didn't write any letters. They just said, "We're on borrowed time," and

I think something like 10 percent of their original outfit was alive. They had been in Singapore, and they had been evacuated. Their stories were just unbelievable, they were so bad. I remember being up there with those fellows in trenches on top of a hill and watching our guys trying to go down into the ravine and then climb up to try to take Bamboo Hill. I wrote an article that was used as a Life report [Life, XVI:23, June 5, 1944], one of their editorials that has a complete account of that incident. Later on it was chosen as one of the accounts in the war that was honored by being put in a special book.

But these are things that you just have to experience in order to understand. I don't think anybody should have to experience them--but to really understand what a horrifying situation it is you must. Another time I was down in a little ravine behind the hill where I was living with some Tommies, and they used to bring tea up twice a day, with open buckets tied onto the backs of burros, one on each side. Of course the so-called tea was always filled with saccharine, and you had grasshoppers and bugs of various kinds. You never had a lid on anything. I was standing there with two Tommies, who were about six feet away from me. We were talking, and they gave me some of this lousy tea, then they started right down our ravine. From Bamboo Hill, the Japanese were lobbing shells over the hill where the trenches were, right into this ravine.

They knew the terrain so well--they'd been over it; they knew it--and these shells came bing, bing, bing, just like that. A shell hit the ground about twenty feet away, just absolutely cut off the face of one of the men. The other guy was killed, but I wasn't scratched, never even scratched. It killed the donkey. I was standing on the other side of the donkey and I think it shielded me. I don't remember what it was, but such things happened so many times in the war that I just couldn't believe it.

I think one of the weirdest experiences was when I was still in Delhi. I had charge of seven artist correspondents from Life. As they would arrive one by one, I would assign them different parts of the area. Of course, I set up the idea that I was going to go to China; that was for me. I waited until the last man arrived, an old, old friend of mine from San Francisco, an artist named Lucien Labaudt, who I'd known, a remarkable fellow. He was in his fifties, and I was in my thirties. When he arrived, he was the last man I had to send out to a particular place. So he said, "Where am I to go?" I said, "You're going to go to upper Burma, and you're going to work around the Merrill Marauders" that were being trained there. "Oh, no, I've got to go to China." I said, "Well, you can go to China, we'll all go to China, but we're going to take turns." I said, "My orders are cut, and I'm leaving on Monday." This was on Thursday. I said, "I'm going, I've been waiting

here for two and a half months to go." He said, "Millard, I just have got to go to China or I can't stand it." I thought he was going to cry. Finally I said, "Well, I don't think there's a chance that I can get your orders cut. Yours are cut for the other place."

But here, again, is one of those things. Way back in the early days here, I knew the commanding general socially. I called him up, and I told him the situation. He said, "Well, my, you don't ask for much, do you? Hell, you can't do this, according to regulations." I said, "I know, but this man is a remarkable artist. He's a very good artist, and he's an old friend of mine. If it means that much to him, hell, let's let him go up there for a month or two, and then I'll go up. Or I'll go up anyway." So finally he said, "Well, all right, I'll see if I can get him cut." So he did the next day. It was Friday. He called up and said, "Okay, I've got the orders cut and I think you ought to give me a dinner party for this." So we made it a celebration for the artist and for the general and for a couple of other friends of mine, correspondents. We had a beautiful dinner party, and we really gave Labaudt a send-off. I was heartbroken inside, but at the same time I knew how much it meant to him, and I thought, well, what the hell, I can go where I want to later.

So we took him down to the plane on Monday morning, real early, a plane to go down to Agra, where the Taj Mahal

is. There he was to catch the plane up to northern Burma and then over the hump. We gave him a hell of a send-off, and away he went.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 10, 1976

SHEETS: Late that same afternoon I was cleaning up after painting, and one of the Life photographers rushed in and said, "Millard, what was Labaudt's first name?" I said, "What do you mean 'what was'?" He said, "He was killed on the plane that you were going on." I said, "How in the world . . . ? What do you mean?" He said, "Well, what happened was that he went down to Agra, and everybody was loaded on board the plane. A fighter pilot, a major who was very famous out there, walked into the cockpit and said, 'Captain, I'm going to fly this today up to Burma and then over the hump.' The young pilot asked him, 'Have you been checked out on these twin motor planes?' He said, 'Oh, yes. Get over.' So without going through the routine of really checking him out, he let the major fly. Well, he came over this big airport up in northern Burma, and he undershot the field by 1,000 feet, and everybody was killed." That was the plane that I would have been on.

This thing happened so many times. Here I lost one of my closest friends, but time after time when I was flying bombing missions, there were similar situations. I would fly with a group for maybe a week or two or three, get into a card game one night, a poker game, and somebody would say, "Why don't you fly with this intelligence group

tomorrow?" I'd say, "Okay," and I'd go with them the next night, and the crew I'd been flying with were killed that night. It just happened so many times it's just kind of like a bad, funny dream. But the Arakan campaign was a pathetic thing because they never gained a mile in that whole campaign that year, and thousands of men were terribly wounded or killed.

One night while we were there the Japanese infiltrated. (You don't have nice, clean front lines in this jungle fighting.) They infiltrated what would have been called the front, and 200,000 Japanese came through. They got seventy-five miles behind the British lines, attacked general headquarters, and killed the three generals under the commanding general. The only way he escaped was by jumping over a cliff and hiding in the jungle. The British were in terrible consternation, and they thought that this was it, but they reassembled their forces and counter-attacked. I'm ashamed to say this, but as far as I know, they never took a prisoner of the 200,000. They just slowly eliminated them.

A good friend of mine, another correspondent, working with UP [United Press], who later went down to the Arakan when the British did let some correspondents go, was walking where he thought he was twenty miles behind the front, and a Japanese shot him through the buttocks from up in a tree. This sniper was still there long after the Japanese were

driven out. He got a Purple Heart, which was hung on the seat of his pants at the presentation. These were incredible experiences.

But after being with the British about two months, I got some kind of fever again. They didn't know what it was, so they sent me back to Delhi, where Life had an apartment for its people which could take three or four men but generally one or two would be there at a time. It was there that I met Eric Sevareid on his way up to China. Then later, after he had made his famous jump from a crippled plane on a flight over the hump, landing among Naga tribesmen and walking out for twenty-seven days, he stayed in my apartment. We've been very good friends ever since.

At Christmastime, I had a marvelous ten days up at Udaipur, where I was sent for a rest cure, and it was a great chance to paint. It was fantastically beautiful and interesting. I went back seven years ago, and it hasn't changed an iota. It's something that I had always talked about, and my wife and I wanted to see it together. We thoroughly enjoyed it.

After that I went down to Pandavesvar, which was about sixty miles west northwest of Calcutta, where we had our Tenth Air Force headquarters. This was the headquarters for all the Liberator bombers. General Davidson, the commander, was another man who I had known, even long

before the air school days. His wife had studied painting with me way back when he was stationed at March [Air Force Base] at Riverside and I was teaching at Claremont, so it was great to be with him. The bombing missions were going on every day or sometimes twice a day all over north Burma.

I was on the longest mission that was ever flown by a Liberator in the war. It was a mission to 100 miles south of Bangkok, all the way from Pandavesvar. The planes took off at fifteen-minute intervals and nineteen bombers went out that night. As there was a complete undercast and a complete overcast, there was no way we could sight anything, so it was all done by navigation. We flew for so many hours south over the Indian Ocean, and then we turned at a certain moment and flew over the Malaya peninsula. I never saw it. Eventually, we were way south of Rangoon, clear across those high mountains. In fact, the map showed that there wasn't any mountain higher than 10,000 feet, and we were flying at 10,000 feet. But the only time we saw anything was when there was a little bit of moonlight and we saw a peak that must have been at least 2,000 feet higher than we were, which we saw in time and went around. Then we descended in the dark and with no visible sight until we got underneath the undercast. We came out at about 400 feet.

It's incredible--I know it couldn't have been accidental--but dead ahead of us were the islands that we were supposed to bomb. The Japanese had built about twenty-five big

concrete gasoline tanks on these islands, which were off-shore about five miles. As we came in, climbing to about 1,500 feet, the bombardier was all set. By his reckoning and the navigation, we went in for the bomb run. I was lying on my belly underneath the flight deck with my head hanging out the bomb bay door, and I watched the bombs go out. You're supposed to count maybe two seconds for the bombs to land, but before I could count one second the whole damn place blew up. There was a plane close ahead of us that had hit half a second ahead of us. We just tore that place from hell to breakfast and then discovered there was a fleet of Japanese ships in the lee of these islands. Our damn captain thought it would be smart, having gotten all the bombs away, to go down and strafe them for one last push. That's one of the many times in the war that I thought, "Well, there is no way you can go one minute beyond this." It's strange what happened to me every time that happened, and that is a sense of utter peace. I can't tell you why. Fear goes out the window. It isn't because you're brave. It's just something that the human body does or the spirit or something that makes you feel like it's inevitable. You'd had a hell of a good ride up till now, and that's it. Tracer bullets were coming up our tail, and a man was killed in the cockpit that night. It was just incredible. Yet somehow we got out of there, and we headed back to India. We were a little bit crippled, but

not too much, but we had a bad wind situation. Of course those planes in those days didn't have controlled, pressurized cabins. We ended up landing on the mud of the Jumna delta, and then we had to be flown out by helicopters. The airplane was finished, and there was no way of getting out by any other method.

On other missions, we flew over Rangoon; we flew over Mandalay; we flew over all sorts of areas in north Burma. We flew on a cover mission when a big glider attempt was made to take a section of Burma 1,000 miles behind the Japanese lines. That was a weird experience. They took over 500 gliders, towed them into the area, and cut them loose. The problem was that as they went down, they couldn't get out of the way of the next glider. More men were killed that way than any other way. But they did get the bulldozers on the ground, and they did clear the ground up to where they could bring fighter planes and other planes in with materiel. We held that position until the end of the war. It was a very important strategic venture, but a very costly one.

We were in every kind of situation: night fighting and day fighting. I've seen enough Zeroes to last me forever and then some. But it was an experience that you can't possibly measure because it affects your sense of values and your sense of how good life is.

GOODWIN: You never got to China?

SHEETS: I never got to China. It's incredible. The reason I finally came back was on a temporary junket to New York. There was so much political chicanery going on out there, and we knew by the grapevine that [General Joseph W.] Stilwell was going to be fired. That group of correspondents--and that didn't include people like me; it included really great foreign correspondents who had spent their lives in the area and knew everything about the history and the culture of the country--they knew the position that Stilwell occupied. He was born in China, he had a great feeling about China, and he was very hep to the fact that Chiang Kai-shek wasn't really fighting the war, but was saving all the materiel and his men to fight the Communists--which maybe was a good idea, but nevertheless it didn't fit into the scheme of things. It soon became apparent toward the very end of my trip that [Stilwell] was going to be demoted or fired. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] Arch [Archibald] Steele and Teddy [Theodore] White and a whole group of men that distinguished themselves certainly for their knowledge of the area and the background and the history were terribly perturbed about this demotion and felt that they had to get the word to Washington. The British would not let anything go out through censorship. No way. So finally I prevailed upon my friend Lord Mountbatten, saying that I just had to go back home. I needed to do some things, but I would come

right back. The British wrote up the most marvelous orders for me to go home, and I was the only one allowed to go. Needless to say, I spent a lot of time with the correspondents to put the story together properly, through their eyes and their background and their knowledge, and I took off.

I had an incredible trip back to the United States, expecting fully to return, but due to the circumstances it was never possible. But the trip, I'll briefly touch on. I went down to Delhi to wait my turn, and there were long, long lines of fellows who had orders to leave as they were due for a return for one reason or another. It would take anywhere from two to seven or eight days to get on a plane. In those days the C-54 was the biggest thing afloat, and they didn't carry more than about forty passengers.

While I was down there, I ran into Colonel Wurl, a man who I had flown many, many bombing missions with, a wonderful guy. I met him in the lunchroom, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm going home." He said, "Well, so am I. I'm taking a famous airplane back. We're going to use it in the United States. All my men have completed their missions. I've got a catch-up crew. It isn't my regular crew, but it's a group of different people that are ready to go back. Why don't you go with us? We're going to have a Cook's tour. We're going to go to the Holy Land"--which is now, of course, Israel--"we're

going to Egypt, we're going to go over the battlefields of North Africa, and then we're going to head down, cross the Atlantic to South America and get back to the United States." Well, I had made a date with my wife as to when I'd get home; the date had been made in the most difficult way because you couldn't put a date in the letter. You couldn't say anything about when or where you'd be arriving. But by piecing a bunch of things together in about ten letters, I figured that she would get the idea that I wanted her to meet me in New York, because I had no thought that I could get back to California at all. I was going to be in New York briefly and then return to India. So in talking with him I found out that they figured out it would take about so long, and maybe if everything was right, I would be two or three days late. But even that gamble bothered me because I knew she was coming across country on the train and that things were going to be tough. We were pretty darn broke because the salary in those days was so little.

GOODWIN: What was it?

SHEETS: By comparison. Oh, goodness, I made so much more on my own than I could make as a correspondent for Life magazine. We had just built a huge house, and we had all sorts of obligations, four kids, and the problems were very, very complicated. So finally I said, "Well, Colonel, I just know how exciting it would be." I said, "I'd rather do it than anything in the world, but I can't do it because

I have to be back." (I didn't mention my wife, because you didn't in those days. You know that kind of a situation.) I said, "I'll gamble to this extent: I know I can get to Karachi in a couple of days, according to my orders, and if I'm still in Karachi when you get there"--they were completely fixing up this airplane, working on the motors--"I'll go with you happily, believe me. Otherwise, I'll have to go on."

In those days, the only way you could get home, unless you were a general or something very close to a general or a very high diplomatic person, you went into Karachi and then you went down through central Africa and across to South America and up. Only a few people went the northern route: Tripoli to Casablanca, the Azores, and then across. So knowing this, I got to Karachi, and I was there when the first B-29s arrived, which was a tremendous experience. Oh my God, it was unbelievable. The husband of Amelia Earhart, George Putnam, was the PR officer for that group, and we were friends. He woke me up in the middle of the night one night, saying, "What are you doing here?" I went out and went all through the B-29s and had an exciting morning there. I was set to go on a C-54 at three o'clock in the afternoon. At one o'clock in the afternoon, Colonel Wurl flew in. I was both happy and unhappy at the same moment. Of course I wasn't worried about my passage because there were at least 150 guys waiting for a no-show. So when I went over

and checked out at the counter and told them that I was going with my friend Colonel Wurl they were delighted.

Well, we took off, and it was a long flight. We went up first to Abadan, and that's the first place I'd ever seen Russian fliers. We were turning over planes like mad to the Russians, and they had their camp all covered with barbed wire, and everything was black. They would dive in like they were crazy, out around the field, and our guys were supposed to fly straight and level. There was a lot of feeling there. But it was an interesting experience. It was 120 [degrees] in the shade. They said that was really cooling off. It had been about 160 there.

We left the next day, and it was so exciting. We landed at Tel Aviv, where we immediately rented a car and a driver and went up to Jerusalem. We spent two days in Jerusalem, which was a fantastic experience. You couldn't believe how beautiful it was. We went to Bethlehem, and we saw everything. There was no strife, no Arabs to keep you from crossing lines. We had a marvelous trip.

I remember one incredible incident. We had a very nice guy, a most devout Catholic boy from Minnesota. He was a great big gunner, a huge guy. When we went to the famous church where Christ was born, which was built right over the crypt, we got down there, and it seems that the crypt is used constantly all day and a good part of the night with different kinds of church services, different

religions of the world. At this time, a group of Greek Orthodox priests were there, and they were throwing these things around, making smoke signals and chanting and what-not. This young guy who was such a devout Catholic [laughter] kept getting a little closer and a little closer, and finally with his hobnails on the top step, his feet slid out from under him and he went right down those steps absolutely flat on his back, lying right underneath the whole ceremony. He was so mortified, he just thought that he had to kill himself. He couldn't stand it, it hurt him so much. He just couldn't believe it. We had the worst time with that guy. It was worse than during the war, trying to get him to think that he was not going to be eternally damned.

We left there and went to Egypt, where we had two beautiful days. Then we took off at dawn to fly the battlefields of North Africa. Stuff was still smoking, a lot of it, as it had been less than two or three weeks before that the British had finally whipped the Germans. There were tanks and trucks and buildings. We flew at 400 or 500 feet, and had an absolutely Cook's tour of the area.

Then finally, after going by Tobruk and all of those places for hours, it seemed like, we took off right across the Mediterranean toward Tripoli. At that time the Germans were still coming down with their fighters and sweeping the Mediterranean, just with ease. They didn't have anything to keep them from doing it. We were a little bit skittish

about that area. But we were flying along there, straight and level, and I was sound asleep in the waist, when all the bells went off, the jingle, jangle stuff. I sat up and picked up the intercom immediately and listened, and looked out when I heard them say our outboard motor on the left side was on fire. God, I never saw such flame in my life. Those Liberators are funny airplanes, anyway. It wasn't over five minutes later that the inboard motor on the same side caught fire. Well, the captain started asking questions, issuing orders. He wanted to know where the nearest airfield was. He wanted a lot of things, and he told different guys to do different things. It was really incredible to listen to all this, to hear how these people can think, and this guy Colonel Wurl was something.

He found out that the nearest airfield was something like 200 miles, right on the edge of a cliff on the Mediterranean, but it was 200 miles just at a right angle turn south. So we headed for it, and we were all ordered to put on our Mae Wests and told that we might have to jump any minute, because if the fire got any worse, the whole plane might blow up. It wasn't a very easy 200 miles because they couldn't make very fast time. I think it took over an hour, as a matter of fact, even though we were very high when we started and were diving all the time. Finally Wurl, about halfway, put the fire out by diving so fast that he cut it down. [phone rings; tape recorder

turned off] We're diving very fast toward the coast, and finally we can see it. I never believed we were ever going to make that coast. I thought we were going to end up in that water with the Mae Wests. But we made it. When he came in to make a landing, he had his left wing straight up, flying absolutely vertically. He came down and he got within about--I don't know, it seemed like five feet, but it was probably fifty feet from the ground when he just flopped that wing down. And when he hit the ground, he hit it so hard, by just the change in that maneuver and everything else, that we bounced at least fifty feet high. I didn't think anything would hang on the plane--of course, everybody was strapped down. I think the second bounce was twenty feet high. And the whole plane just shook.

Well, we went on down this little tiny fighter strip that the Germans had used during the time when they were in Africa, and it was probably not over 800 feet long. This Liberator, with no controls, really, landed and hit that thing, bounced these two or three times and then rolled right on past the end of the runway into the desert into the great sand dunes--bumpity, bumpity, bump. Finally we came to an unbelievable stop. The colonel called out and said, "Everyone report in. Are you all right?" Everyone reported in by intercom. Nobody was hurt, but we were sure shaken up. Finally Wurl said, "All right, let's get out of this airplane. This is still not the safest place to be

because of those fires. We don't really know what's going on." The bomb bay doors were jammed, and we had an awful time getting them open. The only way out of those Liberators was to go down through the bomb bay doors, which are about two and a half feet from the ground.

We're just crawling out from under this thing, when down the runway--and it was a good, big quarter of a mile away--came a jeep going like a bat out of hell with a guy with a bullhorn saying, "Don't move, don't move. The whole area is mined." The British had mined it to keep the Germans from coming in there. To cut a long story short, it took three hours for them to come out with mine detectors, clearing a very funny path. Finally they got to us, and they walked us out one at a time through that whole minefield. How we ever went through that minefield without blowing it it up is just miraculous. The Tommies couldn't understand it; there was no way they could explain it.

So we get back finally to these three little dumb tents that were there, and by this time the wind has come up. It was weird, really weird. The last part of that walk, I couldn't see anything below my knees. The sand was shifting so fast that it was like walking in water. No dust or anything above the knees, but just this weird feeling of the whole desert moving under you. You can't believe it. We got up to this little tent, and Colonel Wurl checked in with the commanding officer and told him who he was and

said, "I've got to get a message immediately to Cairo that we're down." The officer said, "Well, I can send that kind of a message," which he did. Then I said, "Well, I'm not really attached to this plane, and I have to get out of here. Can I send a message?" He said, "No personal messages whatsoever." I said, "Well, this isn't a personal message. I have orders." He said, "No, no way." I said, "Where's the nearest railroad? Where's the nearest automobile road?" He started to laugh and said the nearest railroad is 175 miles through solid desert, the automobile road is 125. "Right out there is the marble arch that Mussolini built to celebrate his victory over Ethiopia. But that road doesn't go anywhere, and it doesn't come anywhere. There it is." He said, "An airplane comes in here every two weeks to bring us supplies, but they were here the day before yesterday."

Well, I remember taking a cup of tea and walking out behind this tent and sitting on the ground, with this sand moving, and damn near bawling. I just thought of all the dumb things to have gotten myself into, I don't know what I'm going to do about that poor gal. She'd be there, in New York, in something like forty hours from then. I've never been so low. About that time I heard an airplane going overhead very high. It was an American DC-3 that had been turned over to the British in Tripoli, and it was on its way to Cairo. It was up about 10,000 feet.

And I never looked at anything so longingly in my life. It went right over the field and just kept right on going and finally disappeared out of sight.

Then all of a sudden I heard the funny kind of back-firing and funny popping that some airplanes make when they land. I looked up, and here this DC-3 had turned around and had quietly come back and was landing on the field. The reason it was landing was that the captain or the young lieutenant flying the airplane had a cousin who was standing watch on this field, one of the eleven men there, and he thought it would be nice to just say hi. He hadn't seen him in a long time, so he came down to get a cup of tea. Well, he came in and he knew enough to land short, and he and his copilot came up for a cup of tea. Of course, as soon as they got over hugging each other, I told him who I was, showed him my credentials, and I said, "I'm desperately anxious to get back to anyplace where I can get a plane to the United States." He said, "That's Cairo; that's where we're going. There's no stop in between."

Well, I had been told I should never get separated from my gear, and I had a metal box with all my paintings, all my drawings for a year in it, and it weighed over 250 pounds, and I had my own personal stuff as well. I swallowed real hard and told him I had this big box, and he said, "I don't care if it weighs a ton. We've got an empty ship. No problem." So he sent the guys out with their mine

detectors and a little kind of a funny trucking thing they had, and by golly, they get my box, and they brought it back with my suitcase. After being on the ground for two hours, counting the walks that I made through the minefield, I'm on an airplane headed for Cairo, which was over 1,000 miles back, headed east.

So at four o'clock in the afternoon, I arrived back at the place that I had left at dawn. I walked up to an officer at the desk, and he said, "What the hell are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I'm here first to report the fact that Colonel Wurl is desperate: the plane is down, he needs motors, and equipment to get the plane rebuilt or whatever has to be done." So I got all that off my chest, and the British sent a plane out early the next morning with everything that they needed to work with. In the meantime, the Tommies started clearing the minefield. They'd get a jeep and pull the mines out. Our men were down for about ten days, but they finally got out. I had promised, of course, to call Mrs. Wurl and the families of everybody else who was in the plane, which I did when I got to New York. But in the meantime the officer said, "Now, what about you?" I said, "My orders are to go as fast as I can to New York." He said, "Well, let me see your priority." I had a priority three, which wasn't very high, so he said, "Well, Mr. Sheets, you haven't got a prayer of going that way. You've got to go clear back to Karachi, India." Karachi, India was at

least two days of solid flying. I said, "There's no way I can go to Karachi, India. I've got to be in New York--it's a desperate problem, and it's secret." He said, "There's no way." He said, "I don't know even when I can get you back to Karachi. We've got people stacked up here a mile high with credentials one and two, and generally we only take ones on this route, which means generals or top diplomats." Well, to cut a long story short, I suddenly remembered that a general friend of mine had said before I left, "Millard, I'm going to give you a very special letter, and if you get in a jam, use it, no matter what."

GOODWIN: And you were in a jam. [laughter]

SHEETS: I'd never read that letter. I opened it up, and there were ten copies, army fashion, signed by the commanding general of the American supply forces. Well, when I read the letter, I nearly flipped. It said, "No matter what the situation is, expedite in every possible way Mr. Sheets's return to the United States and then his return back to India." Well, you can't ask for more than that, so the officer said, "Well, this beats anything I've ever heard of. How soon could you leave?" I said, "I'm ready." He said, "There's a plane out on the ramp right now and there's a no-show. Have you had anything to eat?" I said, "No, I haven't had anything to eat all day." He said, "Well, I'll see that something is put aboard." So in eight minutes I'm on a plane, with my big box, which he even put on, and I'm headed for Casablanca.

We landed in Tripoli, then we flew on to Casablanca getting in there about two or three o'clock in the morning. As we're getting off, I can hear these guys droning out, "Let me see your card priority." Then they'd say, "One or two," and they'd stamp it and say, "Well, call us in ten days." There were dozens of people backlogged in Casablanca on ones and twos. I could just hear what they were going to say to me with a three, so I got down to the gate where an officer looks at my card. He takes one look at it and says, "My God, how did you ever get here on this plane?" I said, "Well, it's a long story, but I'm here." He said, "You'll never get out of here. You've got to go back to India. There's no way you can go from here back to the United States." I said, "Well, we'll talk about it tomorrow." So he gave me a billet order downtown, which would be like forty minutes by taxi. So I saw that my stuff was unloaded, and I very carefully hid out until all of the people had left, the whole bunch of them had all gone to town. Then I went out to where they said the executive officer was for the night. His noncom sergeant asked what I wanted and I said, "I want to see the executive officer." He said, "Well, he's not here." I said, "Well, it's important that I find him. Where is he?" And he said, "He's way down near that hanger." I said, "Thank you," and walked down to the hangar and found him.

So I pulled out my letter, copy number two. The first

man had kept number one. He read the letter, and he said, "Oh, do you know what this does to me? There are 150 men that sleep out here every night, all day, all night, just waiting for one no-show. I've got a no-show on a plane that's going to leave in thirty minutes, but they would tear me from limb to limb if I put you on that airplane, if I go through the routine." I said, "Well, what's the unroutine?" He said, "Well, according to this letter it's got to be unroutine. I've got to get you on there. The only way to do it is for you to stay here. Where's your gear?" Then I swallowed real hard and told him all about that heavy box. "Oh," he groaned, "they'll never take that kind of weight." But he said, "You stay here, and I'll get a jeep, and in the last minute I'll load you but remember, if that no-show shows up, then you're out. It's leaving within thirty minutes."

So I waited. Everybody was loaded on the airplane. A guy came down with a jeep, drove me right up. I climbed up this little ladder, and my bags were on board--I could see them. I very gratefully went over and sat down on one of them. The same exec came on board and said, "Now remember, until that door is locked and the plane's motor starts, you'll still have to get out." I thought those motors would never start, and finally they locked the door and the motors hadn't started, when I heard this bang, bang, bang on the door, and I knew what it was. The door opened up, and a

guy comes in. I knew he was heading for me. He came right to me and he said, "The captain will not take that extra weight. It's either you or the box. You can go or the box can go." I said, "Well, I've got to go, but would you really understand how important that box is, because it's a year's work, and it's necessary it gets there as soon as possible." He said, "I can't promise you anything about when it will get there, but I will personally see to it that it's taken care of and it will get on the first chance. But every plane going out of here is overloaded."

So with that we took off. I thought, boy, I'm going back no matter what. And as it turned out, we landed in the Azores, flew on to New York, landed, got out of hock, and I took a taxi downtown. I had stayed off and on for years in the old Barbizon Plaza up on Fifty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue. I went to this hotel, with all the confidence in the world, and didn't realize that rooms were just not available. But getting there at four o'clock in the morning, they must have had a short-time room because they had a room for me. I walked into my room, picked up the telephone, called California and found that Mary was in Maryland with her brother, where she had arrived a few days before. She was supposed to arrive in New York the afternoon of that morning. So, I was on time.

I got ahold of her, and she came up to New York by train. And it was really an incredible meeting. She

hadn't been in that room with me more than about two hours when the telephone rang and it was the airport calling to say, "We've got some gear out here. You'd better come and pick it up." That's how fast that good guy back in Casablanca operated. Well, then the last part of the story I'll tell very quickly, if there's any tape left.

GOODWIN: A few minutes.

SHEETS: [Henry] Luce had a big luncheon for me to give my report on what was happening in India and China. No one on the entire Time-Life staff would believe a word I said. I explained that this was not my story, but the story of the correspondents, including a lot of Life people. They heckled me from twelve noon until seven o'clock that night. And finally Mr. Luce, who was very nice, said, "Well, Millard, I think you ought to go back to California and get a rest." They thought I was touched.

I came back to California, and I'd been back about two weeks when six correspondents came back to New York and the story really broke. But I didn't know that. I was called by James Flannery, who was at that time head of the news for CBS for the West Coast. He said, "We understand that there's a very tough situation, that General Stilwell may be demoted, may be brought out. I understand that you've just been home two weeks and that you know a great deal about it. Would you do a program with me? There's a five o'clock newscast which we send

to South America and Canada and all over the United States." I said, "I would be glad to do it, but I know that you wouldn't want to do it when I tell you the facts." He said, "Come in and have lunch with me."

So I went in and had lunch with him and I told him the whole story. He was dismayed and could hardly believe it himself. We talked, I guess, till two or two-thirty. We went back to CBS. It was raining very hard and I had left my overcoat in his office. I went up to get it, and on the way past the ticker room, he just grabbed a whole bunch of ticker tapes and walked on in with me while I got my coat on. He said, "Wait a minute, read this." It told about these five correspondents that had returned. They just forced the British to let them out, and they had broken the whole story, and here it was. He said, "My God, are we on time. This is perfect. We'll play it close to the belt and do a tremendous job."

So we went on the air for forty-five minutes, and I told the facts just the way they were. We went out and had a quick drink, and I drove back to Claremont, which took another hour and a half in those days with no freeways. When I arrived in Claremont, my wife said, "There's a telephone call for you from New York. It was the head of all the correspondents for Time-Life, a fellow that I'd done a great deal of work with in Fortune in the early days, Dave Hulburd [David W. Hulburd, Jr.]. So I called

him, and he said, "Millard, are you out of your cotton-picking mind?" He said, "What in the hell happened to you this afternoon? Why would you do such a thing?" He said, "You know that your story wasn't accepted." I said, "I know it wasn't, Dave, but," I said, "I also saw the ticker tapes when they came in that so-and-so and so-and-so"--and these were all top correspondents--"had been back and broken the story." "Well," he said, "you don't know the half of it. The instant that we had that information we had a White House command that not one word would go out on the air or in the press. You did it. There hasn't been one word that has come out of this thing. You are ordered to stay in your home." I said, "I'm not ordered to stay in my home, period. I am no longer working for Life magazine, if that's the case." He said, "It's a White House order." I said, "It will have to be a different colored house because I'm not going to stay in my home at all."

Well, it turned out that two days later, they couldn't hold those correspondents down. The story got out and into the press, and it was a mess. But that was a pretty discouraging moment when I realized that our news was controlled to that degree. Anyway, I heard no more about the whole affair from Life. I went on and I finished up some work for Life, [laughter] and they had my full issue of all the war paintings I had done, that were coming out. The plates

were made, they were starting to print, and the armistice was signed. So of course they immediately changed the whole magazine, and my war paintings were never published. But they did publish several other articles with my things, so I was never shortchanged on that side of it. It was an exciting experience, but I was glad when it was over.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 13, 1976

GOODWIN: Last session was devoted to a full discussion of World War II. Now we're going to backstep a bit and discuss Mr. Sheets's involvement with the Los Angeles County Fair--we already discussed the very beginning--beginning as a employee of the county in 1931 and continuing until 1958. What were your various responsibilities at the fair, and how were they organized?

SHEETS: George, as I explained to you, Theodore B. Modra was a very unusual man, bringing an extraordinary amount of background about American artists, knowing, as I told you, people like Bellows and Henri so intimately. After he had allowed me to come to his studio month after month for criticism and really to stimulate me into working outdoors, by the time I was maybe sixteen, he asked me to be his assistant at the L.A. County Fair art exhibit. By this time, he had a nice wooden building; it was no longer a tent. He had an L-shaped building that he had designed. One side of it was for crafts, and Leta Horlocker ran that side and ran it very well. It did run a little bit toward sentimental china painting, but basically it was a good exhibit of needlework, weaving and ceramics. It was the beginning of the growth of these crafts and this variety of media in this area. I think the County Fair did a lot

to stimulate the colleges and individual artists to do these things seriously. The old idea that they were "minor" arts and not very serious, as against "fine" arts, was an idea that Mr. Modra was very determined about in his attitude. He felt that that should be broken down, and he certainly did everything he could to do it. We had good prizes, good juries, and the show grew gradually.

GOODWIN: Who could submit work?

SHEETS: Anyone from here in this state or even as far away as Texas, if they had wanted to. We had many entries from Arizona. There was no real limitation to the entries. In the beginning, however, I would say 90 percent came from just the Southern California area. Gradually it grew, and we had entries from all over the state and, as I said, from out of state. I learned a great deal: first, how juries were handled, and of course I spent most of my time physically carrying pictures, hanging pictures, putting wire on paintings, building pedestals for sculpture and all those things, which was a great experience. I learned not only what had to be done in an exhibit, but I learned to respect the whole jury system. Modra was very tough about it. He had the best people he could find come for juries in those days. I'm not even sure that they received any compensation. They were artists selected very carefully, which meant that if they exhibited they were not in competition. I remember very clearly that I was impressed with this, though I made

probably forty cents an hour. They would drive out from Los Angeles and various places when they agreed to serve.

[Modra] died very suddenly, when I believe I was not more than twenty or twenty-one. I guess I might have been twenty-one. The fair board, to my surprise, asked me to become the director of the show. I ran the show for two or possibly three years in the same building that Mr. Modra had built. But by this time I was able to get up a great deal of excitement about the show. I'd increased the budgets considerably, and I persuaded the fair to build a new building. I should explain to you that this was not really a county operation. Though the county was associated and it had the name of the Los Angeles County Fair and the county gave certain funds each year, it was a grant rather than anything that they operated through civil service. It was a private corporation, which, I think I told you, my uncle Lewis Sheets started. It worked very closely in harmony with Los Angeles. We used to use the old Otis Art Institute as the headquarters to receive paintings after I started the larger shows, when I had our jury meetings in Los Angeles. We were very closely related and in a very happy way. But the show was a separate and independent organization. In the early thirties we built the new building, and slowly, through the years, as the fair became more pleased with the exhibition, we were given more attention and publicity

by the press, which of course meant something to the administrators of the fair.

GOODWIN: What was the essential purpose of the art show at a county fair?

SHEETS: Well, the thing that Mr. Modra started and I continued for the first few years was a very good annual show for the artists of Southern California. It was a place where they could display their best professional work. I thought our show certainly was on a par with what was occurring at this same time, the same type of exhibition, at the Los Angeles County Museum. The L.A. County Museum had one major show a year for the sculptors and painters and a separate show for watercolor and graphics. We had one show for all. We put our graphics into the same new wing that had the crafts. But basically it was to encourage in every possible way what all the artists were doing. We had substantial prizes. Most of them were not purchase prizes in the early days but were cash prizes.

GOODWIN: How much were they?

SHEETS: I think that by 1932, even though it was the Depression, I think we gave $500 as the major prize in oil painting. I think it was $400 in watercolor. I don't know why it should have been less, but it was. Sculpture received $500. Then there were some honorable mentions and I believe one or two second prizes. We did make a few sales, which was very encouraging. But mainly

it was really a chance for artists to exhibit when there were too few chances in those days.

Step by step, I brought various people in to assist me. The first major assistant was Richard Petterson as head of the crafts and that whole side of the exhibition--which was considered by me certainly and by the fair as an equally important adjunct. Though painting and sculpture did perhaps get more publicity, we worked terribly hard on the idea of having the finest jurors, the finest quality in crafts, and began to give purchase prizes, as we did eventually in painting. If I think of the whole twenty-seven years that I was connected with the fair, I would say that about ten years were devoted to this type of exhibition, where we had good juries of acceptance, good jurors for awards, and out of that period--probably six or seven years--we gave purchase prizes that got up to some substantial amounts, like $1,500 or even $2,000 at times.

By this time we attracted works nationally. The last two years we had a major show of painting and sculpture. I had a jury meet in New York, and I went back to meet with it. We gave the jurors an allotted number to choose, and we brought those paintings and pieces of sculpture from New York out here at the L.A. County Fair's expense. We had a similar jury in Chicago. At the same time, we would have a similar jury which,

every two years, we alternated between San Francisco and Southern California. Then we would put the combined California and national shows together. I would bring the chairman of each jury from the East, plus two or three members from California, to serve on the jury of awards. I think that on the last year of that exhibition we gave in the neighborhood of about $25,000 in major prizes, both purchase and cash prizes. We had a very interesting collection by the end of this time.

GOODWIN: Where was it housed?

SHEETS: It was housed at the county fair. We loaned the pieces, because it became a very nice exhibit, really. We loaned them to colleges and to small community museums.

It was about this time that there was a great deal of ferment, particularly amongst amateur artists who felt that the show was professional and that they didn't have an opportunity to exhibit. So we started an amateur show in the domestic arts building, which was a very, very large building. The fair gave a substantial number of prizes and so forth and the opportunity for amateurs in painting and sculpture and everything from bedspreads to whatnot to show their works. It was an amazing big building filled with the kind of things that amateurs make. Some of them were very exciting. I used to buy things quite often out of that just because they were examples of beautiful handicrafts. However, the professional exhibition became

more and more separated from the general knowledge of the public. Each year the prizes seemed to dismay more and more of the public, not merely the fair board, but the public itself. We used to have approximately 500,000 people go through our exhibition in seventeen days. It was an extraordinary attendance.

GOODWIN: Wow! Did they have to pay to get in?

SHEETS: Oh, no, there was no pay at all. It was a very beautiful building in the sense that it was properly designed for the kind of people we had to handle. We had excellent lighting and I think we hung the shows well. Then the war came. I believe that it was for two years the county fair was dark. I believe it was on the third year of the war, or perhaps the fourth, that they reopened.

I had just come back from India, my war service (it must have been the first September after the end of the war, whenever that was), and I thought it would be an interesting thing to change the format. Instead of having a typical exhibition of oils, watercolors, sculptures and so forth, I conceived the idea of an exhibition which I titled "One World of Art." I had something of a problem to explain this to the board because I knew that it would require a large step upward in the cost, in the budget itself. I thought that it would be interesting to bring together examples of most of the world's greatest

cultures of the last, let's say, 400 years. We couldn't obviously, get into everything, but we did go back, I think, in a few instances to older cultures. I felt that with a world that was so muddled with hatreds and fears and all the things that go with war, that it was the right time to show that Japan, for example, had a fantastic cultural heritage, that Germany had, that Italy, of course, had. I thought it would be very, very exciting to try and get the finest examples I could from all these different cultures that made up the people who really were involved in World War II. So after much talk and some debate--they were good enough to let me come to the board meetings; I didn't have to go through some administrator--I was able to sit down and talk with the whole board. I did persuade them that it was a worthwhile thing and they finally agreed. Then the problem was to not only select the works but to get them here safely and get them back safely. I borrowed things from the Metropolitan Museum; I borrowed one thing from the Louvre, one thing from the British Museum, many things from other American museums. I borrowed one of the most fantastic pieces of sculpture from India, one of the greatest stone torsos I've ever known, from the Honolulu Academy of Art. They own it still as one of their prized possessions, we had that. We had marvelous, great seventeenth-century paintings from Germany. We had beautiful Italian, Spanish, French, English, American examples.

GOODWIN: Weren't the museums, both foreign and domestic, reluctant to loan their work because of security?

SHEETS: George, in those days it was very different than it is today. First of all, there were not even slightly as many demands from one museum to another. The number of museums that would pay the expense of insurance and the cost of shipping and whatnot, though those expenses were clearly nothing as compared to today--it just wasn't the common thing to do, particularly coming from far east to far west and across the sea. I was fortunate that I knew people at the Metropolitan and other museums and had been on juries where I'd met many of these people. We were just lucky because I know that you couldn't do this thing today. I'm absolutely confident of it, between the danger of accident and the carelessness of handling things today. We used to send a box with assurance on Railway Express, for example--this was long before any real air freight--and it came undamaged. Today it just isn't that safe. Today you're better off to rent a truck and put it on board and have your own driver and take it across the country. But in those days it was much safer, and the museums were much more willing. I've seen that slowly change. Well, it's changed steadily from those days, from that year on, even. While I was still at the county fair, you could see it change. So we were lucky and were able to do it, and to do it with great examples. Somewhere

I have a catalog, which I'd love to show you.

GOODWIN: I've seen it.

SHEETS: Oh, have you?

GOODWIN: Some of these are in the UCLA Art Library.

SHEETS: Oh, good. So anyway, we enjoyed it, and it was so exciting to have a preview that created as much furor as this did, because there were a lot of people who resented the idea.

GOODWIN: Why?

SHEETS: Well, human nature. You are taught to hate somebody for three or four or five years while you are at war with them, and then somebody says, "Gee, isn't this great? It's Japanese." Or, "It's German." You or I don't feel or think or would never, I'm sure, be caught in this trap. But humanity is a very funny thing, in my opinion. It doesn't take too much propaganda on either side to get people to hate quite easily. I was surprised that we were even slightly picketed, not seriously. There were people who even wrote some very unhappy articles about what business did we have showing these things--these were our enemies. Well, we were at peace. At least the war had ended.

But on the other hand, I remember so distinctly--and this of course would probably still offend a great many people--our then-governor, who later became chief justice, [Earl] Warren, was terribly excited about this exhibit. I wrote to him, knowing that he always came down to the fair

on the opening day, which was customary in those days. Perhaps it is now--I don't know--but the governor always came to open the L.A. County Fair officially, as he did the state fair. The state fair actually was a big fair, but ours was always the largest county fair in the world. We always had well over a million in attendance, which, I suppose, wouldn't mean much today, but in those days, it was a lot of people. So I wrote to Governor Warren and told him what we were doing, and he telephoned me almost immediately and said that he was quite interested in the idea. In my letter I asked him if he would consider doing a walk-through with me for television. They had asked me to do one. I thought it would be particularly wonderful if he would be willing to do it. He telephoned me and said that he would be most interested in seeing the exhibition, that after seeing it he would discuss with me whether he would do the TV or not. He came down two days ahead, instead of the normal day ahead, and walked through the exhibition with great enthusiasm and said, "I don't pretend to know about art, but I do believe I understand what you're trying to accomplish." So CBS did a one-hour show on television. In those days you had to drag cables that were bigger around than lampposts, it seemed to me. I've never seen so many lines in my life. The 500 distinguished guests that we had asked to come to the opening were really literally standing on the steps while we did

this program, and it was slightly uncomfortable to be doing this thing while they were outside. Then we had to clear the material afterwards before the guests could come in. But it was a great experience to me to walk through that exhibition with Governor Warren. He was the most responsive person. He tried really to get into every single piece, and to have me explain why it intrigued me. It was a most pleasant experience, and we did get a tremendous reception from the thing in terms of television. It was very early television--there weren't too many people who had sets in those days--but it was great.

GOODWIN: Was there a large public response to the show?

SHEETS: That's what I meant. There was an amazing public response. We never had more people ever come to an exhibition. They just absolutely mobbed us. It was worthwhile.

GOODWIN: I saw that Arthur Millier helped you on the catalog. He wrote some of the text.

SHEETS: Yes, I don't know how many catalogs Arthur wrote for us, but I would say in the last perhaps six or seven years of the show he wrote most of the catalogs. He was tremendously interested in the idea of what had been Mr. Theodore B. Modra's slogan, "bringing art to the people." That was his slogan, which I think we all adhered to, really. This was no high-hat show. If people came through with five kids pushing a baby cart, this is what we wanted, to expose them to the best that we could. Arthur was the

kind of critic that really cared about people and tried to educate them. He wasn't the kind that we sometimes have today who sits in a special little world of his own, being somewhat snobbish about the world. He was very devoted to this show. It was great for us because he always had a way of saying things that seemed to appeal to people.

GOODWIN: We haven't spoken about Millier before. How long had you known him?

SHEETS: Well, ever since he became an art critic, I guess, is the only answer to that, which must have been about 1929. The critic before him who retired had used Arthur as kind of a protégé once in a while. When Arthur began to write, it was just at the time that I was getting started. So we were really thrown together, I believe, in '28 and '29. With my having won those prizes and having my first exhibition, he was extremely generous toward me because of my youth and because I was getting started. I've always thought that Arthur was probably more helpful to more artists than any other single person in Southern California. Not merely by being nice--he wasn't always nice--he used to really tear you apart on occasions if he felt like it, but he was very sincere. He took time to try to figure out what you were trying to get at, instead of imposing his own personal taste on everything that you did. I know of dozens of artists that I grew up with who feel the same way about Arthur Millier. He was a marvelous catalyst between what

they were trying to do and the public. I know that he had a tremendous influence on my life. Not that he told me what to paint--I don't mean that kind of an influence--but the fact that he gave me a voice in the public sense, which worked in hundreds of ways, not only as a critic of my painting, but by assisting me at the fair, lecturing in the colleges on occasion and helping me bring people to the West--for various reasons. Whether it was for a jury or whether it was to speak or to do a commission, he was always in there, really working for the good of the artist. And this is what a critic, I think, should be.

GOODWIN: Did he have any particular causes or champion any particular artists?

SHEETS: No, and I thought that he was extremely catholic in his taste for that period. Now, if you remember, this is before a lot of the isms that followed. Though he did his own etchings and drawings and watercolor painting, he was tremendously behind the abstract painter and the expressionistic painter. He had a feeling about the whole development of modern art through impressionism and into postimpressionism and cubism and whatnot. This was his area, and he knew these things well and had a great love and affection, which he expressed in his writing. As we've discussed before, he didn't talk about art as though he knew all about it but didn't like it. He talked about it in the sense that he truly believed in the importance of

it. I know time after time he really put people in front of the public, gave them an opportunity that lots of critics just don't seem to have any feeling about today at all.

I think the fair show following "One World of Art" was "5,000 Years of Art in Clay." That was one of the most interesting shows because in this particular instance we eliminated all of the crafts except the ceramic. Of course, we started with the most ancient examples that I could get. I went again to the Metropolitan and to some of the great museums of this country and was able to borrow incredible objects from Egypt, from the Middle East, from Greece, Rome, Etruscan, and coming on down through every facet of European and Chinese and Asiatic cultures. It was a great exhibit. I included in the exhibit some of the disciplines in contemporary industry, showing the way things are actually produced in clay. By photograph and with objects and whatnot, we had enough realism in this area, along with the art objects, to give people a sense of how important clay is in daily life as well as its being a highly creative, expressive material, creatively and aesthetically.

GOODWIN: I notice there were 670 pieces in that show, so it was a big, big show.

SHEETS: It was a big show. That allowed us then to go right into the whole craft side, the other end of the buildings, with a major show of contemporary ceramics, national as well as lots of things borrowed from Japan

that were contemporary. So all in all, I've always thought that was one of the really good shows we put on, and I've always thought that the catalog was expressive of the fact that we enjoyed it in every way.

For the following exhibition, we collaborated with House Beautiful magazine. I went East and persuaded the editor of the magazine, Elizabeth Gordon, to agree that we invite some ten designers that the editors of House Beautiful and I agreed upon to design very special rooms, sometimes a suite of rooms. We actually built these rooms completely within the art gallery. Again, we used the whole enormous building. That building was over 300 feet long and 100 feet wide. It was just a series of marvelous spaces. We had a combination very often of architect, interior decorator, and artist working together on projects to do creative things within each of these rooms. They also produced the finest furniture, the finest fabrics, the finest everything that we could get, with the idea then that House Beautiful would do a major issue on the exhibition. Well, they were really impressed when they finally came out to California when the show was virtually complete. They were very much interested in the final installation and so forth. They brought about six people on their staff out here, their decorators and writers. They were so impressed, they eventually did two issues: one very large issue, and the second issue had a very good article. There were marvelous

photographs, reproductions of the rooms and so forth. Of course, that made a tremendous hit, because every woman in the world looked at House Beautiful in those days. That show was also well attended; in fact, all of those exhibitions were.

GOODWIN: The basic point of that show was that any room could be designed as a work of art?

SHEETS: Every room should have a presence. Every room should have a feeling of good sense and good planning and function, but also have a real quality of color and atmosphere. Works of art could be assimilated, not merely as something stuck on a pedestal or something hung on a wall, but as an integral part. We had a great deal of work that was actually done just for that room, specifically designed and executed in sculpture and in painting. There were small murals. There were special titles. It's hard to remember the number of projects we had, and I think there were at least thirty artists.

GOODWIN: According to my notes, there were sixteen rooms in the show.

SHEETS: That's about right, and I think there were at least thirty artists working for months on this project in collaboration with the other people. The fair paid the expense of the whole thing. I don't mean that the artists were paid--in most instances they were not, though a few were. But it opened up great new vistas for certain

artists, just being exposed to this.

GOODWIN: Do you think the philosophy underlying that exhibition has changed?

SHEETS: Well, I don't think the philosophy has changed, because unfortunately it was not the philosophy at the time. The problem was and is that decorators and architects too often are more apt, if they wish to include art, to search around so they can find something they like. They seem to be somewhat dubious about sitting down with an artist and having the artist have a say in the development of the plan. I think the artists are as much at fault as either the decorator or the architect, because unfortunately artists are not trained, as part of their basic education, to recognize the meaning of collaboration, the excitement of collaboration--not only the discipline but I think the responsibility of collaboration. I've spent my life in this, so that's why I created this idea or suggested this idea to the fair without any change of philosophy. But unfortunately it wasn't at that time, and it isn't today, the way it normally works, though there are marvelous and exciting, rare exceptions. I know architects who are fabulous with artists and artists who are tremendously gifted and able to work with them. But there hasn't been the emphasis in art education, and there hasn't been the suggestion that artists should become more and more interpreters and less and less egotists, until

they can work with whatever the problem is. I think that unfortunately it hasn't changed--it just hasn't arrived at that point yet.

GOODWIN: So it would be pretty difficult to do a similar show today?

SHEETS: No, I think it wouldn't be difficult. I think I could find today, easily, the number of people that I could give the confidence to work with other people. It's like breeding horses: you put the right mare and stallion together and you're going to get a good horse. I'm sure that it could be done. But unfortunately there aren't enough middle people, enough middle men or middle women. There aren't enough people, I should say, to care enough about trying to blend these forces, and they're marvelous forces, and they need each other desperately. They just don't know how. They haven't been educated to appreciate the need and the possibilities.

GOODWIN: What about the financial aspect of this problem?

SHEETS: That's pretty shocking, as far as that show was concerned. Do you mean that show?

GOODWIN: Well, the implications of that show. Can middle-class people afford quality art in their home?

SHEETS: Yes, I think so. I really think so. Certainly American middle-class can without any question. This is a part of the realism that must be faced by everyone. I had an experience when I was called in by a very old friend

of mine just last Saturday to discuss fees for a very special project that he had been asked to design for one of our largest, most important corporations. He is one of the finest ceramic designers that I know. I think he has the finest taste, is the most skillful, the most beautiful, beautiful person. He's a marvelous person. I found out that what he really wanted to talk about, when he and his charming wife invited me to lunch, was how you arrive at a fee. He had done a job for a company in Japan, and he had ended up really holding the short end of the stick in a very unfortunate way because he hadn't been wise in his contractual relationship. He simply hadn't been thoughtful about it. I think he was a little bit dreamy-eyed when he approached the problem, in his excitement about going to Japan and doing the job. Well, he didn't want to be burned twice, and I could understand his consternation. But I was shocked at how little he had thought about what would be a normal way to try and price a job of this kind. He was trying to get from me, "Well, what do other designers get, what has this type of operation or corporation paid before for this kind of thing?"

I said, "Forget what others have paid. Sit down and honestly put down, let's say, the best three years' income you've ever had. Take an average or take the top. Then figure out how much of a year's time you anticipate this will take. If it's a fourth"--which he thought it was--

I said, "all right, then put down as a base fee one-fourth. Now add to that at least another 25 percent of that amount for contingency, because you're going to go into extra time. Then add what you think are the unusual expenses that you are going to be involved with in studio help and other things. Add to it the travel and per diem that you anticipate or make simply flat arrangements that they pay all travel and per diem. Be very careful that if it means going East, which it will, that you're paid on the days that you're there and traveling because you're giving up your work here. As much as you'd like to be just a nice guy, put it down. And when you total that all up, be real brazen and add 25 percent to that as a reason to divert yourself from your regular work." I said, "That is the kind of thing that I think anybody could do without any mystery. And certainly you can't then complain if it takes a little longer or if you missed something, because it's a chance to serve. Then put your emphasis not on how much you're going to get out of this job, but how lucky they are to get you for this price, and you're doing it mainly because you expect it to be so successful that you will be asked at least once a year to do such projects." Well, it just shook the hell out of him to realize that it's nothing that he couldn't have figured out himself, that there's no mystery about it.

GOODWIN: Doesn't it come out to be a pretty hefty amount?

SHEETS: I don't think so, no, because when I said 25 percent,

I wasn't talking about 25 percent of his time, I was talking about 25 percent for contingency. That's the only safe thing because suppose they sometimes don't like the first two or three designs in their very preliminary state. All right, you can't figure that close to the belt that you're going to spend three months, when it may take five. So that's where I add the 25 percent. Furthermore, if you have an assured income and you're moving along in your own world without pressure, you're entitled to some readjustment time. As a designer, I know what this readjustment time means. It means that you are getting out of your sphere. You're entering a whole new set of relationships, human and otherwise. You're meeting a lot of very important disciplines that have to be mastered in addition to your regular work. You can say, well, that's something you ought to just learn on your own. But on the other hand, if you stay in your own bailiwick, you don't need to worry about this, and you go on in the regular way. So I think it was very sane. In fact, I would say this: if he does that, according to the indication he made to me what his annual income is, I think he will be below what he's really entitled to because of his national importance as a designer. Not in the field that he is being asked to enter, but in the field of his own creative work, he is one of the very top people in the country. I think they'd be lucky to get him for the price that I figure, but I think he will feel that he's making a

very good step. The next job would be much clearer to him. He'll be able to arrive at another figure.

GOODWIN: Well, if a big corporation has to pay a nice salary for a top designer, what is the ordinary family going to do in terms of getting advice?

SHEETS: It's a totally different thing when you're talking about designing something of which they may sell between two and three million dollars' worth. It's a totally different problem than a neighbor or a friend or someone that just happens to like your work who comes to you and suggests that they would like to have you do a very special thing for their house. That's something you do as a commission right along with your regular work. You know what you get for this kind of thing, and I don't think there has to be anything added. That seems to be the normal way that the people work. At least that's the way I've always worked. In fact, some of the most exciting things have come out of that kind of contact. You do it because somebody wants something, and they really feel it. They like it, and they have a special problem. This happens so very many times. You get excited about it, you do it, they get excited about it, they're happy to show it to their friends, and pretty soon you're besieged. The problem with artists is that they are too reticent about wanting to get involved with anything off-beat, other than just doing their work in their own way, submitting it, and then the hell with it. That's wrong.

Because artists really have unlimited opportunity if they open the doors of their mind and their spirit by getting involved with good people.

GOODWIN: This discussion, of course, is based on the exhibition "Western Living" at the county fair. What was the specific message to people visiting that exhibition? Was it "Go out and get some good advice when you design your home"? Or was it "You can do this yourself with some experience"?

SHEETS: Both, I think both. I think in addition to that, it opened the eyes of many people, undoubtedly thousands of people--not hundreds, but thousands of people--to see what a perfectly beautiful bowl, a ceramic bowl, can mean in the right place, in the scale of the room, and the excitement, the identity, the character, the personality that enters a room with that versus something that you buy in an ordinary, rinkydink shop. A piece of sculpture hung on the wall, a painting, or a special tapestry, people were so tremendously responsive to this thing, I can't tell you. And I know we had a tremendous influence upon people's buying. Now, I don't know how many of them would have gone through the process of saying, "You design this for me," although I've known hundreds of experiences like that, too, not only through my own experience but through people coming to me, asking, "Who can I get to do something?" I've had the most fun in my life saying, "I know exactly the person

you should ask," then calling that person and saying, "Now, approach this properly and it's going to be an exciting experience." And it works.

GOODWIN: You seem to be implying that almost anybody is capable of developing good taste. Is that true?

SHEETS: I think so. I think that good taste is based upon as much discipline as is required in mathematics or in the knowledge of chemistry. I think that a person can, by exposure and by thoughtful study, serious study, can enlarge his taste enormously. I can't say that everyone is going to be equal. I wouldn't suggest that. I think some people are infinitely more sensitive; they're deeper in their love of life; they have a great deal more perceptive power than others. But I've hardly known a person that you couldn't, if he was interested in learning, be of tremendous help in developing his taste.

GOODWIN: As an art educator, I'm sympathetic to your point of view, but in a way I also feel that it's wishful thinking, that it's too much to expect, that most people have the potential of becoming quite sensitive to their environment visually.

SHEETS: I understand why you say that, and I think you have a good position. I can't say that what I'm talking about is easy to achieve. I think it's difficult to do it en masse. I think it's difficult to do it at the scale and education that is so often demanded from a teacher. But if you have the chance to be with people and have an opportunity to expose them to fine things, expect them to do a reasonable amount--and perhaps I will suggest an unreasonable amount of research and reading and continuous looking--people do begin to develop comparative judgment. And this whole thing I'm talking about is a comparative judgment proposition. I think perhaps the thing that expresses it the best would be to discuss innumerable collectors that I have known in my lifetime--and I've lived long enough to see them develop, over a period of thirty years, forty years, from the most banal, ordinary kind of taste to exceptional taste.

Now, I think one of the things that sharpens a collector more quickly than anything else is their investment. There's

an old saying that there are lots of people who love art, but it's platonic till you buy it. And I thoroughly agree with this, because as a collector I don't think in terms of owning art; I think in terms of being surrounded with things that talk to me and that I get so much out of. I've known collector after collector who started out buying the obvious, the picture, the sweet thing, the thing that requires the least thinking. But as they are reviewed by their contemporaries, and as they look around more and become more conscious, some of them very quickly realize that many times those are bad investments. So they begin to look more deeply into it.

Now, I think that anytime you can be, as I have on so many occasions, practically living with people, twenty or thirty people for two solid weeks, talking day after day--what seems to be almost like talking to a blank wall or a solid rock wall--along about the middle or certainly the latter third of that time, you are amazed at the impact that you can have in that length of time. In the breakdown of fear, for example. I taught last summer a very intensive course up at Asilomar in a workshop for Jade Fong. There were 130 people, and there were four teachers. We worked literally day and night. We started at seven-thirty in the morning with breakfast and ended up at eleven o'clock with criticisms in a small theater. And I'm getting letters now, at this time--perhaps it has to do with Christmas, and

I've had them all of the fall, all during the fall--letters literally by the dozen. I must have had at least thirty letters from people who show gratitude for having had the fear of so many things broken down. Now, one thing I didn't think about was talking about being fearful. But in getting people really excited and stirred up and involved with their thinking and their reasoning and their judgment and the way we looked at the things together, I tell you, it's a fantastic thing that you can do. One of the worst problems is that in ordinary teaching you meet them once or twice or three times a week in a darkened room with a bunch of slides, or you talk to them, and they're half-asleep. But if you get into the situation where they can be truly exposed and you expect a great deal from them, it's amazing what can happen. I know it isn't easy, and I know that I'm sounding oversimplified.

GOODWIN: Well, I think one of the basic reasons that the problem is so acute is that art isn't taken seriously in school. Kids don't study art through the grades, and if they do study art it's usually in a rather superficial way.

SHEETS: Well, absolutely, you couldn't be more right. Another way of saying it is that sometimes they're exposed to a lot of art without ever having really been given some sense of why that art exists or the function of it or the place of it in society. To merely talk about names and dates, as I was told in high school to remember some names and dates after looking at slides, doesn't really get you

very far. But when you begin to get involved with the quality of mind that a piece of stone can imprison, and you begin to feel it and see it, then you never look at another piece of sculpture the same way--whether it's a painting, whether it's a drawing, whatever it is. I think you're absolutely right. I think the superficiality of teaching teachers to teach by the gross, or worse than that . . . . As I told you, I think, my Latin teacher became my art teacher.

GOODWIN: Right.

SHEETS: This is a poor, poor substitute for cultural depth.

GOODWIN: Well, I know the situation today in the Los Angeles city schools is that a student does not have to take any art in order to graduate from high school. So theoretically, after a kid graduates from elementary school, he may not have any art the rest of his life.

SHEETS: This is true. And he may feel that it's only for ladies and people who don't have anything else to do. It's a very sad thing. Yet it's interesting to me now, working with business people, working with people who are older, who I'm sure went through much the same struggle--and I'm certainly not talking about the masses, but I'm talking about people who have developed themselves as human beings, who've traveled, who've built homes and built businesses--it's extraordinary how hungry I find these people to know what the arts will do for their lives. The only word I can use

is hunger, because it's something that they crave, and they need help even in their adult stages of life to un-self-consciously approach these arts.

I think I told you before, one of the most exciting things in my experience in working with bankers and industrialists and so on is that many of them become very important art collectors, not because I tried to make collectors out of them, but I got them excited because I'm excited about these things. They take care of themselves from then on. They have to be introduced, and when they're introduced, they know that nobody's trying to make some kind of mysterious magic out of this thing, that it's a down-to-earth thing that man has always craved and needed. The only reason the arts continue in life is because they're part of the languages; otherwise you have no means to communicate these elements of feeling.

GOODWIN: There's another county fair exhibition I want to mention, and that was 1953, "Painting in the United States."

SHEETS: Well, I think that was the one that I mentioned where we had the juries in the East and the Middle West.

GOODWIN: Oh.

SHEETS: Yes, that's the same exhibition.

GOODWIN: This was 150 paintings, essentially tracing the history of American art; and then toward the end there was an overview of contemporary painting.

SHEETS: Oh, that's right. I'd forgotten that I had

invited some of the great early things. That's right. I'd forgotten that part of it. In addition to the juries that we had of contemporary things, we did have some great earlier things, that's right. I'd forgotten that.

GOODWIN: I was kind of surprised that in 1953, at the Los Angeles County Fair, you were showing Gottlieb, Motherwell, Reinhardt, Hofmann, Baziotes.

SHEETS: Sure.

GOODWIN: That seems pretty far out.

SHEETS: Well, even though I'm a representational painter, and I suppose those people would call me ultra-, ultra-, rancid conservative, which I've never thought I was, I have never felt that way about other kinds of art. I'm interested in all kinds of art. I had the pleasure of selecting what I thought were some of their best works for that show. It was an exciting show to me. I've always done that. In any of the exhibitions at [Scripps] College or the county fair or later at Otis, we saw no lines of demarcation. I fought for the right of people to do, you know, whatever type of art they wanted to do.

GOODWIN: Was there any rivalry between these big exhibitions at the county fair and the operation of the Los Angeles County Museum?

SHEETS: No, unfortunately they stopped the local exhibition when we became really involved with it. During the Depression, there were budgetary problems. You see, Los Angeles County

Museum had a series of directors who were not interested in art. They had, oh, for a long period of time someone in one of the sciences [William A. Bryan]. I've forgotten now which one--I think it was geology. And later they did have a very good man, the head of the art department, who later was involved with the Metropolitan Museum, [Roland] McKinney. He made things lively for a while, but he couldn't persuade the board, which at that time was largely interested in the science and history side of the old museum, to give them the budget for even the annual show. Then the next director was Dr. [Jean] Delacour, who was primarily interested in animals and zoos. He was a fascinating man. I became a very close friend of his because I loved birds, and that was his great joy. He's written some of the greatest books on birds. It was at the time that I went to become the director at the Otis Art Institute that we became such close friends, when we met as department heads. But we met on the bird-life side rather than on the art side. Then, of course, when the new museum was built and Ric Brown became the art director, he was interested in only the things he was interested in. He had no interest in the local artists whatsoever, except a few, a very small number that he happened to like. I'm sure you've had this from Jimmy Byrnes as well as or better than I can tell you. But there was a very vast gap between the approach of the curators at that time and anything like a local exhibition.

So there really never was any competition.

GOODWIN: It sounds that in some sense you were doing the museum's work for the museum.

SHEETS: Well, we filled a very important need--there's no doubt about it. We worked closely with some of the smaller museums, like Santa Barbara and San Diego. I used to spend a tremendous amount of time working in San Diego and Santa Barbara, lecturing and jurying and persuading the artists in those regions to become involved in the county fair. It was great because we pulled the state together pretty well during those days. Even from the north--we had a tremendous number of things that came from the San Francisco area. But the museum, which I think should have been doing that, was just not interested.

GOODWIN: So, for a certain time of the year, the best place to see quality art was at the county fair.

SHEETS: For a big exhibition of a cross section it certainly was. There were of course a few galleries in town that were showing excellent things, but for a good cross section of what was going on, I think it was a very satisfactory thing.

GOODWIN: Did you know Dr. [William R.] Valentiner at the County Museum?

SHEETS: Yes. He was an amazing man. He, of course, came with a great background and reputation from Detroit. I was always disappointed that he didn't get more local support than he did. I can't remember--did he die on the job or

did he die right after he left?

GOODWIN: He left Los Angeles. Of course by the time he came here, he had retired from Detroit, but he retired again and then he went to help organize the North Carolina museum in Raleigh, and he died in Raleigh.

SHEETS: That's right. But he was probably a little ahead of the group that really got behind the new museum. If it had been a little later, I think Valentiner would have been very successful here. But it was hard, after having had the support of great wealth in Detroit, to conjure up much of that here. I remember it was a discouraging thing for him, and it was discouraging for me because it seemed like the L.A. museum just wasn't going to come out of the doldrums. And then it did very suddenly, indirectly from me. It started with Howard Ahmanson.

GOODWIN: We're going to talk about that later. Did you have any contact with the old Pasadena museum?

SHEETS: Yes, many kinds of contacts. I knew the early directors. Grace Nicholson gave it to the city of Pasadena as the Pasadena museum, and of course I was a very close friend of Grace Nicholson. I had bought some beautiful Oriental things, Japanese mainly, from her and had been so accustomed to the gallery. The board that was formed in the city included Jarvis Barlow and his mother, who were wealthy and devoted patrons of the arts. I knew Virginia Scott for many years, whose museum I am very

involved with since her death. [doorbell rings; tape recorder turned off] Mr. [Albert B.] Ruddock, as I remember, was the chairman of the board, and they had birth pains, which most institutions have. I was called in on several instances to discuss problems with them in the more abstract sense, in handling exhibitions and that kind of thing. Then Mrs. Scott asked the directors and was granted the privilege of putting on, if I remember, three major shows a year of individual artists--in some cases retrospective, in some cases their current work. I was very happy to be asked to have a retrospective show, which I did. In every way in the early days, I was involved in and out without any assignment or certainly no appointment of any kind. But we exchanged quite a few exhibits between Scripps and Pasadena, our ceramic show particularly. We used to send some special things that they invited out of that show afterwards. And we had print shows that we shared jointly.

GOODWIN: But it wasn't a museum of modern art at that time?

SHEETS: It included modern things, but it was not a modern-art museum. It had Oriental material because of Grace Nicholson's background. She loaned some very important things to them, and they borrowed some very important things. Rather tragically, they built up quite a large museum collection, and when the new group came in and suddenly switched and made it into a modern museum--which,

as you know, ended up in bankruptcy--they sold and virtually gave away the majority of the museum's collection. Now, out of that were some very important things that were sold at very nominal prices to get rid of them because they didn't suit the particular taste of the new princes of the modern museum. I think this is one reason that makes me very skeptical about giving things to a museum.

I'm in this problem right now, where I would have loved to have had the faith in giving maybe Scripps or some museum certain things in our collection. The thing that perturbs me is, all a museum has to do is to change curators, and you take what was in the basement and bring it to the top, and you take what's in the museum and put it in the basement. Maybe that's an exaggeration, but I think that it's discouraging for people to give in great sincerity a collection to an institution and then have it misused. I think a tough board of acceptance should always be set up for a museum because they're obviously offered more gifts, whether for tax purposes or for pure love, than they should accept automatically. I think that a very intelligent, extremely wise, well-trained committee should have power to accept or reject. But once you accept, it's bad faith in my opinion to suddenly get rid of these things, whether by sale or by putting them in a permanent icebox in the basement.

I was shocked, as I'm sure you may be, by the fact

that the Brooklyn Museum is just selling some tremendously important material. In their case, it's a matter of survival, however, for operating expense. Yet they turn around and pay $1,800,000 for a [Albert] Bierstadt. I don't know where the "survival" quite fits into this. They sold eleven major works in order, I heard, to "survive," and then the first thing I know they're buying a painting that is hard to believe is worth $1,800,000. But in any case, that's the way museums go.

I think it was tragic for the Pasadena museum, which had quite a bit of good material of some of the earlier California artists and sculptors--maybe they weren't great, but they're part of the heritage of this area. There would have been many ways they could have been used, put on loan, occasionally shown, without dismissing them as though they were just unimportant material. The same thing has happened at the L.A. museum on several occasions.

GOODWIN: Have you had any contact over the years with the Huntington Gallery?

SHEETS: Yes, I've had a reasonable amount of contact with the Huntington. It was a great shock to me to discover that in Henry Huntington's will, he insisted that there should at one day become an American gallery of absolutely top quality to balance the English eighteenth-century paintings.

GOODWIN: You're kidding!

SHEETS: I'm not kidding. The various boards, since Huntington's death in the early 1900s, have been largely involved with the scholarly side of the Huntington Library. Though they were given at the time what seemed like a very enormous endowment of better than $30 million, they have used the income from the $30 million to enhance and develop and widen the scope of the library. They have also purchased in the neighborhood of some 600 to 800 British drawings, prints, etchings--graphics. They have bought a few paintings, English eighteenth-century. Though it's somewhat off the record at the moment, I'm sure that within the next two years there will be an important, very important gallery of European eighteenth-century paintings given to the Huntington Museum, which will be an interesting balance to the collection of strictly British eighteenth-century paintings that occupy the galleries. Their hope is to have an American gallery, and they're definitely headed in that direction, but it's going to mean a great deal of outside assistance and an enlargement of their endowment fund in order to accomplish it. But it's part of their plan.

GOODWIN: It seems that traditionally the Huntington has been kind of an island unto itself. It hasn't sought any wider involvement.

SHEETS: That's right. Well, one of their problems is that in the will it is stated that they cannot loan paintings. Now, if you're stuck with a situation that you cannot loan

a painting, it's very difficult to borrow paintings, even if you're an established, very important institution, as certainly the Huntington Library has become, worldwide. It has one of the great research libraries--not only in English literature, but in American history and literature and many other fields in American life. It's a vast operation. In fact, I think I was told recently by the director, Dr. [James] Thorpe, that there are 1,140 scholars there working continuously today in the library. Now that's something you don't see as you enter the premises, but they're there, and it's great for this area to have such a library.

GOODWIN: While we're surveying some of the art institutions of Southern California, we should mention the short-lived Modern Institute of Art in Beverly Hills. Do you remember that?

SHEETS: I remember it, but I had nothing to do with it--and my feeling about it is not even developed. I don't know, and I certainly couldn't be informative--because I know the people that were back of it and I know that there was such a zeal for it--but I never did know why it couldn't get off the ground, and it certainly didn't. So I'm in complete ignorance of that.

GOODWIN: Let's return to the county fair. What was the situation in the middle fifties, shortly before you left?

SHEETS: Well, everything was really moving along

beautifully, except there were two or three elements that were disconcerting. One was that the artists--I can't say the average artist, but a great many artists, let's put it that way--a great many artists in Southern California were very unhappy about the fact that we did not have our annual juried local exhibition. I appreciated and understood this feeling, but I also felt that what we were trying to do was a better educational job with the public than just a juried show. I felt that many of the artists could have gained more from the exhibition by becoming involved with what we were trying to do and becoming stimulated by the thing, but a lot of the people who complained the most never came to the exhibitions, which often happens. So you had that side of discontent. It was not enormous, but some very strange letters were written by some very interesting people, many of whom were good friends of mine. They felt extremely selfish about the problem and felt that they were being kept out of something. That was one side.

On the other side was the fact that gradually, without trying to make a big thing out of it, our annual budgets were climbing up substantially, and that was partly due to inflation. It was also partly due to the fact that we were trying to do a bigger and better job. No one likes to just repeat anything, and I had a good staff, most of whom were working on a menial basis--I mean not even anything like the kind of labor prices that carpenters or plumbers were

were getting at the time, but they were assisting me in unpacking, packing, hanging, taking down, janitor work, all the things that we did. And we all did the janitor work, believe me. Being the head man, I was the head janitor. I hammered almost every basic nail to hang those exhibits. It was not a matter of asking somebody to do it; I did it with the help of marvelous young people, mostly college people. I never told you what I got as the highest salary, which was, I think, for a year's work. Because the minute one show was over and everything was back safely and the letters were written and thank-yous and whatnot, I immediately started, sometimes even before the show was down, working on ideas for the next show, and then the whole year was occupied. I think the largest salary I ever received was $2,500 for a year's work. So I hardly did it for money. But nevertheless, the budget went up: the shipping, the insurance, the costs of building those rooms. That was, I guess, a kind of fatal mistake on my part.

The board came to me through the director of the fair, who was a man I'd grown up with. He was, of course, very much older, but we'd always been very good friends, and he'd always supported me. But he called me up one day, and I had planned a marvelous South American, Central American show. I wanted a Western Hemisphere show, without the United States, up to and including Mexico, Central

America, and South America. I had made all of the steps during the year before to arrange for this and had some of the greatest artists in sculpture and painting and tapestry and everything else involved. And it would have made a fantastic show. The budget would have been about half of what our budget for our big exhibition for House Beautiful was. But anyway, before, they had always allowed me to come and see them at the winter board meeting.

I think it was in December or November I was called by the head of the fair, and he said, "Millard, I think you ought to have a sabbatical for a year. You've been talking about how difficult it is to do this with all of your other work. We'd like to have you take a year off." I said, "I'd be delighted to do that, but what are you going to do while I'm gone?" Well, he said, "We'd like to put on a great photographic exhibition." [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

I said, "I think it would be fabulous to put on a great exhibition, and I know two or three people who you could get to direct it. I'd be delighted to have a year off. If you start out with the great, earliest prints, which were made in France, and make it an historical thing, and then on the other hand take, for instance, the view of what the impact of photography is upon modern man in all of its vehicles of communication and every other aspect as well as being a highly creative instrument,

I think it would make a great exhibition." "Well," he said, "Millard, we're not interested in that. We want to do a snapshot contest of families sending in pictures of their animals and their babies and so forth and so forth." I said, "Well, Jack"--his name was Jack Afflerbaugh, and we were very good friends up to that time--I said, "Jack, I couldn't possibly swallow that in our art exhibition. If you want to do that under the grandstand, there's tremendous space up there. It's the kind of space where most of the people will congregate anyway. That would be fine." But I said, "If you put that in the art building, in our exhibition hall, where we've stood for something, where we've set some values and stood for quality, I would simply have to resign." I said, "This isn't a threat, this is simply the way I feel about it. I couldn't abide by it." "Well," he said, "I'm sorry you feel that way about it." I said, "Well, that is the way I feel about it, and if you go ahead with this thing, then just automatically accept my resignation, because I will not come back if you put on such an exhibition."

For years after that, Jack and I argued whether I quit or he fired me, and I've always said he really fired me because he accepted my choice without any question. In any case, I was relieved because I had been giving a fantastic amount of time, and I'm sure I would have gone on indefinitely to continue the thing. I knew there was no way I could put

on the kind of show I'd been putting on after a silly family snapshot competition.

GOODWIN: What happened to the art program at the fair after you left?

SHEETS: They had that exhibition, which I must say I didn't see, and then, very wisely, they hired Rick Petterson, who had been my assistant in charge of all the craft end of it as the director of the art department. But they put a man over him who also is a very good friend of mine, a sculptor who had been working for a long time in what they called their "home" exhibit. The builders had a very large area where they built houses, model houses, and decorated and so forth. Johnny Svenson was the head of that department. I guess they thought that he was a man that could stay within the budgets more easily than the rest of us could, so they hired him to, in a sense, supervise, although he didn't in any way supervise what Rick did. Rick has done a very good job. He's made the exhibitions very exciting to the public. There's been a lot of art in action: a tremendous number of potters working, silversmiths, glass blowers--sometimes from Mexico, sometimes from Europe, sometimes from here. Though I have not actually seen an art exhibit since, I've heard very good things about certain aspects of the exhibitions. Rick is a very talented, very able person, and they've had some crafts exhibited in relation to these art-in-action things. It's been largely local, except for a

few cases, as I said, when they went out to Mexico or to Europe to get some special craftsman. They did have some Japanese potters come over one time. I think it's been creditable, from what I understand. I haven't seen one.

GOODWIN: Of course, the rest of the art scene in Southern California has changed much more dramatically.

SHEETS: That's true.

GOODWIN: It's possible to say that the fair plays less of an important role now than it did previously.

SHEETS: That's right. I think they do get a huge attendance, but I don't think anything like we did. They get no real national publicity, or they don't have the impact of getting top artists out and that kind of thing, but still they've done a good job.

GOODWIN: There's one development I failed to mention when we began to discuss the Pasadena museum, although it might have been slightly premature. That is the development of the series of exhibitions called "California Design." It seems that in a sense that series might represent an outgrowth of your House Beautiful exhibition.

SHEETS: Well, I think that that's true, and I think that the very fine woman that runs that, Mrs. [Eudorah] Moore, has always said that to me. Being very old friends to begin with, she has always said that what we did at the fair and what we did at Scripps was the same kind of exhibition, but on a smaller scale. It was the basis

on which she built her whole concept. I know that her spirit is very deep about the craftsmen and the feeling that they have, and she is most enthusiastic. She used to be a juror very often in the early days at the county fair, and she attended most of the art exhibits at Scripps. So I do think there was a nice relationship. Of course what she did in the old building, the Grace Nicholson building, some of those exhibitions were absolutely superb. I have a little feeling as time has gone on that the juries look for more and more experiment and less and less feeling of relating the things that are done to the needs of the community. Not that there isn't always an opportunity and a need for something that is as esoteric as some of these things are, but I think it's gotten a little bit out of relationship. That's my feeling from seeing the last two shows. But I think it's good, it's experimental, and it certainly is stimulating. You might not like it, but it certainly is good for you to see how many ways people can use materials, and it's good. Some of the great craftsmen in our area, people like Sam Maloof and others, have been, in the past shows, very important.

I don't know if Sam was in the last show or not. He, by the way, worked for me for four years as my assistant before he became a furniture designer. He married one of my top graduate students, and I was his best man, which was an honor that I loved. We're still very, very close

friends, but I'll never forget the day about a week after they were married and they came back from their honeymoon. He said, "Millard, I want to design and make furniture. I want to do it full time." I said, "Well, Sam, I think that's marvelous. When do you want to do it?" He said, "Now." I said, "Well, what can I do to help you?" He said, "I've got a little shop that I've been building and I have enough money. As you know, I've spent hardly anything since I started working for you." He was a very thrifty, very clever guy. From the first day that man started making furniture, he was successful--not only in desing, but this is again what I go back to: if you have the absolute love and desire to do something for people, it's contagious. I don't know any human being, really, that is as contagious as Sam Maloof. Sam has friends in every part of the world. He's been sent all over the world by the State Department and other departments in the government to teach. He's been to the country that his family came from, Lebanon. He's been to Greece. He's been in Turkey. He's been all over the world as well as all over the United States, and I think he's been to the Orient (I'm not sure about that). He's on every major committee, including the [National] Endowment for the Arts in Washington. He's one of the most involved fellows I know who still primarily makes every piece of his furniture. He has one or two assistants, at the most, who do sanding and oiling and that kind of thing, but Sam does everything else. He's

exuberant beyond belief. He's an avid collector of beautiful things, and he's become so articulate. In the early days Sam was afraid of his own voice. Now he lectures with ease, and he's so successful because he only talks about what he knows. There's no pretense. There's no affectation. It's from the gut. A great guy.

GOODWIN: We just have a couple of minutes left, and I don't want to get into Otis at this point, but you served as a juror throughout your career at exhibitions outside of the county fair.

SHEETS: Yes. I think that's been probably one of the most important things to happen to an artist. I was so fortunate, I think I told you, getting into the Carnegie International [Exhibition in Pittsburgh] as I did in the last juried show, which helped me to become known more rapidly than many of my contemporaries here. The result is that when they thought of balancing a jury in the East with someone from the West, I was invited over and over again, which meant that I met marvelous artists, some of the finest in the United States. I could just name you a list that you wouldn't believe of the top painters, in every facet of art, not one school. The experience of going to learn and to see and to experience the variety of things that were presented, and then to look for quality regardless of style, taught me at least to be quite catholic in my taste and very excited about things that other people did that I wished to hell I could say I'd done.

GOODWIN: What are just a few of the places where you've been a juror?

SHEETS: Oh, my goodness, Philadelphia, Carnegie, New York.

GOODWIN: The Metropolitan?

SHEETS: Yes, the Metropolitan was that great exhibition of "Artists for Victory." I think I told you it lasted nine days. Did I tell you an experience that happened in that show?

GOODWIN: I don't think so.

SHEETS: About the second or third day, Francis Taylor, who was the director of the Metropolitan Museum, invited a marvelous jury, people like Eugene Speicher and Franklin Watkins, and a whole group of really good painters, representing quite a variety of artists, from semiabstract painters to expressionistic painters, and one or two in my general category. I can't remember all their names, but there were nine of us on the jury: Aaron Bohrod, Niles Spencer, [Charles] Burchfield, Leon Kroll were among the group. After the second day, as we went across the street to a lovely restaurant for lunch, Francis Taylor said, "Millard, I'm worried because these huge pictures that come in, many are mostly blank with a few streaks of nice color, and they overpower a painting that may be a very beautiful small painting of a head or a very subtle landscape. They look like something that happened a long time ago, and they look unimportant alongside these tremendously

big abstract or semiabstract things." He said, "I think the jury is overpowered by these things, and maybe many artists are not getting a fair shake." I said, "Well, I feel that way, too." I said, "What do you have in the basement that people don't know about that's important--maybe a great postimpressionistic picture or something that hasn't been shown. If you have something, we'll run it through for fun, to shake everybody up." To cut a long story short, we went down in the basement, after we hurried back from lunch, and found a magnificent little van Gogh, about thirty inches long and about twenty inches high. It was a little on the grey side, but an exquisite painting of fields in Holland and Belgium with some birds. It looked like the perfect example. And I said, "Let's run it through." Well, of course, I knew it was coming, and I said, "Bring it in about two-thirty." There was this long line of men bringing pictures in one after another, and finally I could see it coming. We voted by pressing buttons on a machine that we borrowed from the National Academy. When the picture finally came up on the easel, I remember Eugene Speicher was the chairman of the jury, and he said, "All right, gentlemen, your votes." I pressed my button, and only my vote registered. The picture was carried away and I let it go until the man carrying it had gone about thirty feet. I said, "Gene, could we look at that last painting again?" When the picture was replaced on the easel, Gene

Speicher crawled up to the easel and said, "Damn you, Millard, it's a van Gogh." Everyone was shaken by the experience, and I can assure you the jury moved forward with great concern.